

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name La Grande Carnegie Library

other names/site number La Grande Public Library

Name of Multiple Property Listing N/A

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

2. Location

street & number 1006 Penn Avenue not for publication

city or town La Grande vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Union code 061 zip code 97850

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Ian P. Johnson

05/06/26

[Ian Johnson \(May 6, 2026 13:17:51 PDT\)](#)

Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
 (Check only **one** box.)

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		site
		structure
		object
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: library

Current Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS:

 Classical Revival

Materials
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

 walls: BRICK

 roof: SYNTHETICS

 other: WOOD

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity).

Summary Paragraph

Completed in 1913,¹ the La Grande Carnegie Library is located at 1006 Penn Avenue a few blocks west of downtown La Grande and a few blocks north of Eastern Oregon University in Union County, Oregon. The twentieth-century Classical Revival building exemplifies the Carnegie Library typology. The one-story, rectangular brick building features a raised basement and a symmetrical front façade with exterior stairs leading from the street level to a centered entrance. Exterior decorative features are concentrated on the main entrance surround, which is elaborated by a pediment supported by brick and wood pilasters, with a frieze above. There are modillions at the molded cornice. Concrete accents and soldier courses provide decorative treatments to exterior brick wall surfaces. Fenestration consists of double-hung one-over-one wood sash placed high on main level walls to provide interior space for bookshelves, with taller one-over-one windows on the south (rear) façade and shorter one-over-one windows at the basement level. Interior stairs lead up from the entrance vestibule to the main circulation area with large reading rooms on either side. The original open plan of the main level has been retained except for replacement of the circulation desk with a gift shop enclosed by partial-height, glass-topped walls. Original finishes include plaster walls and brick fireplaces; original finished wood features including interior columns, door and window surrounds, wood-sash windows, and baseboards have been retained but are painted. The basement level retains its original layout with a hallway leading to what was originally the large meeting room (later the children's library) with original fireplace and several smaller rooms. Alterations to the building include the removal of the circulation desk and built-in bookshelves, installation of partial-height walls around the new giftshop, addition of interior structural posts and ceiling beams, installation of new light fixtures, reconfiguration of the exterior stairs, and replacement of the original exterior doors at the main entrance. The building retains historic integrity through the retention of most of its original character-defining features from the period of significance.

Narrative Description

Setting

The La Grande Carnegie Library occupies a 0.29-acre lot near downtown La Grande (**Figures 1-3**). The neighborhood is characterized by mixed residential and institutional uses. It is dominated by houses that were constructed in the first decades of the twentieth century; it also has several churches and other small-scale institutional buildings as well as a handful of apartment buildings. The library faces north on Penn Ave, with 4th Street at its western boundary, 5th Street at its eastern boundary, and residences to the south. It occupies most of its parcel with simple landscaping consisting of lawns and mature trees on its east and west side yards (**Figure 4**). There is a duplex directly behind the south façade of the library, an empty lot across the street from its north (main) façade, a residence across the street to its east, and a funeral chapel across the street to its west.

Exterior Description

The La Grande Carnegie Library is a one-story rectangular building measuring 50' by 90' with a raised basement. The building has a low-pitch hip roof with wood modillions at the molded cornice. A large brick chimney projects from the west side of the roof. The building is constructed of brick laid in common bond. Fenestration consists of double-hung one-over-one wood sash with modern storm windows. The foundation is board-form concrete.

¹ *The Observer*, "New Carnegie Library Here," Dec. 20, 1913.

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North (Primary) Façade

The north or primary façade is symmetrical with a centered entrance volume that projects slightly from the rest of the façade (**Photograph 1**). The entrance volume has a gabled parapet with a plain concrete cornice and no eaves; the parapet cornice is accented by a soldier course punctuated by concrete shapes that contrast with the dark-red brick. Original decorative features are concentrated at the formal main entrance surround. Slightly projecting header courses form brick pilasters that support classical entablature executed in wood with a paneled frieze and wood pediment. The pediment is open with the brick of the exterior wall at its center. Smaller wood pilasters within this surround flank the entrance, which is fitted with fully glazed aluminum-frame double doors. There is a six-over-six multi-light wood-frame transom above the doors. The entrance is flanked by narrow single-light fixed windows and accessed by two sets of concrete steps from the sidewalk that turn at small landings. Their simple metal handrails sit atop concrete newel posts. A sign on the concrete front of the main entrance stairway reads "Art Center East" (**Photograph 2**).

Concrete belt courses, one below the upper windows and one above the basement windows, divide the façade horizontally into three sections of roughly the same size. The upper wall is dominated by windows in groupings of three, which are accented by soldier courses with concrete squares and rectangles at the corners. The center section lacks fenestration and is adorned with simple rectangular forms created by soldier courses with concrete squares at each corner and a diamond at the center. The basement level windows, slightly shorter than main-level windows, are also in groups of three. Recessed brick courses create a rusticated effect at the basement level, and there is a simple decorative concrete element similar to the belt courses at the foundation level.

West Façade

The west façade replicates all the decorative details of the main façade with cornice, modillions, and decorative brick and concrete elements. The belt courses continue from the north façade, visually dividing the west façade into three sections. Windows are in groupings of two; there is a substantial crack visible on the façade between the groupings of windows. The south third of the façade is slightly recessed and has a single window in its center section rather than the soldier course rectangle detail. There is an entrance at the basement level that is right of center, fitted with a partially glazed wood door, and accessed by one wide concrete step and a concrete walkway. There is a wood bench on the lawn in front of the façade (**Photograph 3**).

East Façade

Decorative features, including the belt courses, also continue onto the east façade. The upper section has a continuous row of five windows, while there are only three at the basement level (**Photograph 4**). The slightly recessed south end has a plain cornice and common bond brick wall surface without decorative concrete features or soldier courses. A concrete walkway leads to an entrance at the basement level, which is left of center and fitted with a partially glazed metal door.

South Façade

The south (rear) façade, which is minimally visible because of its proximity to the neighboring building, is common bond brick with a concrete foundation and plain cornice. There are no belt courses or decorative brick patterns. Three PVC drainpipes span the length of the façade, leading from the gutter at the eaves to the basement level, where they meet a horizontal PVC pipe. Rear façade fenestration deviates slightly from the pattern established on the main and side façades, with rectangular window frames fitted within segmental-arched openings with concrete sills. Upper floor windows are slightly taller than those on street-facing façades. Nine rectangular one-over-one double-hung wood-sash windows are arrayed symmetrically across the center of the upper portion of this façade; they are flanked by two sets of paired windows at either end. At the basement level are seven one-over-one double-hung wood-sash windows roughly the same size as basement windows on the other façades. Two sets of paired basement windows are located at either end of the façade directly below paired upper-level windows, and three

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windows are spaced at irregular intervals across the center of the façade. The projecting cornice with decorative modillions that characterizes the front and side façades is carried around the west corner of the building but not across the rear façade, most of which has a plain cornice like the southern section of the east façade. There is a tall chimney near the east corner of the south façade (**Photograph 5**).

Interior Description

First (Main) Floor

While some of the building's interior fabric has been altered outside the period of significance, many of the original features have been retained. The La Grande Carnegie Library retains its general layout as originally designed, with two floors (main floor and basement level); the main entrance leads to a small vestibule situated between the two levels. A wide set of wooden steps leads up to what was originally the main floor circulation desk area; original inner doors have been removed, and the doorway is open (**Photograph 6**).

The first floor has high ceilings and abundant light from windows on all four sides of the mostly open area. Ceiling beams are supported by square columns with simple capitals. Original window casings, crown moulding, and baseboards are intact, although these and the interior columns have been painted (**Photograph 7**). The main circulation desk, which was originally near the center of the first floor, has been removed. The reference room was originally an open area to the north of the circulation desk. A gift shop, which is demarcated by partial-height partitions has been installed in the reference room area. Because the partitions do not reach the high ceiling and are mostly glass, windows and other features of the space remain visible from most locations and the first-floor interior retains the open feel associated with its original design. Inner vestibule doors (not original) have been repurposed as doors to the gift shop (**Photograph 8**).

On either side of the central circulation desk area are two original reading room areas that are occupied by art galleries. The rooms are lit by contemporary fluorescent light fixtures and gallery track lighting. Interior doors have original wood entablatures with moulding at the cornices. An original brick fireplace on the west wall of the front gallery has its original wood mantel and plastered hood. Original light fixtures, bookshelves, and furniture have been removed.

The enclosed librarian's office area to the west of the circulation desk features a wood paneled door and two fixed single-light windows that face the central open area (**Photograph 9**). Heating system equipment has been installed on the upper walls of the interior office (in the former location of the lunchroom), and window casings in this small area inside the office have been removed along with lunchroom walls. Two or three windows that originally faced north from the office toward the interior of the building have been infilled, as have two windows that faced east from the office.²

Basement

A narrow interior staircase on the west side of the circulation area, between the former librarian's office and reference room (part of which is currently a gift shop), leads to the basement level. The basement level has lower ceilings, with plaster posts and a plaster ceiling. A narrow hallway leads to the original meeting room (which was repurposed as a children's library in 1928) as well as several smaller rooms. There is an original brick fireplace on the west wall of the children's library with a wood paneled mantel and plastered hood. The hood features a mural that dates to the 1970s (**Photograph 10**). The corridor also accesses a set of steps to the basement door on the south façade; the east basement door is

² The only documentation of these interior windows is found on an interior photograph from the 1920s; interior windows do not appear on building plans, and the north-facing office windows are not directly visible in the historic photograph.

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accessed via the boiler room. Most of the basement rooms are currently used for storage or art activities and are filled with large tables and supplies. Built-in bookshelves have been removed.

Alterations and Current Condition

The most notable alteration to the exterior of the building was the replacement of the original central main entrance stairway with a double stairway at an unknown date before 1970 (see **Photographs 1 and 2**). In 1970, the building was sandblasted to clean it, damaging the bricks by removing their coating and allowing water intrusion. The main entrance doors were changed multiple times: in 1958, they were replaced with a wood door described as “blonde” on the interior (this was probably the single door with multiple-light glazing and narrow sidelights that appears on historic photographs through the early 1970s; see **Figure 10**). At some point these were replaced with fully glazed aluminum frame commercial doors (installation date unknown), which were subsequently replaced with the current doors, installed after 2020 (see **Photograph 2**).

Interior features have also undergone some alterations. The original lights were changed to fluorescent light fixtures by the 1950s and have been subsequently replaced at least once (see **Photographs 7 and 8**). The original paneled wood circulation desk appears to have been replaced in the 1950s, based on comparison of a 1920s interior photograph and an undated later photograph that appears to have been taken about 1960 (see **Figures 11 and 12**). By the 1950s, linoleum flooring had been installed. In 1975, posts were added to the basement level to provide additional structural support for the first-floor bookshelves, which were causing the floor to sag. In 1982, more structural strengthening work was undertaken to ensure that the roof could support heavy snow loads and the floor could support additional bookshelves. Laminated beams and trusses were added to reinforce the attic, and the fireplaces were reinforced with concrete and rebar. The most visible change was a new structural beam running east-west added to the main floor ceiling (see **Figures 11 and 13 and Photograph 7**). In 1983, the linoleum floor was replaced with wood flooring, and the 1950s circulation desk was removed, and a smaller circulation desk was installed adjacent to the main entrance. Accessibility improvements were undertaken in 1980 and 1985, the most notable of which was the addition of a wheelchair lift between the basement and main floor. Drawings from the city engineer’s office show that the lift was located just east of the top of the interior staircase; it was decommissioned at an unknown date and is no longer in use. Plans from 1974 and 1985 show that during this era there was a 5-foot 9-inch by 9-foot 6-inch enclosed area at the northeast corner of the librarian’s office that was used as a lunchroom. (Research has not revealed original plans or any historic-era photographs of the lunchroom, and no information is available about whether it was original to the building.) Some of the interior windows that originally faced north and east from the office toward the reading room have been infilled (see **Figure 11 and Photograph 9**). The lunchroom walls were removed after 1985, apparently to create space for the current HVAC system, which is installed on the upper wall of the librarian’s office in the former location of lunchroom.

In 2008, after a new library was constructed, the city leased the building to the Union County Arts and Cultural Center (which later expanded its geographical scope and became Art Center East). The new use required removal of all bookshelves and the 1983 circulation desk, construction of the gift shop, and enclosure of some of the original office windows. The gift shop is a roughly 9-foot deep and 20-foot-wide area adjacent to the interior staircase and north wall. It is enclosed by 7-foot-tall partitions of wooden beadboard. Upper partitions on the south and east sides of the gift shop are glazed. Inner vestibule doors (which are wooden replacements of unknown vintage) were removed and reused as doors for the gift shop (see **Photograph 7**).³

³ Library Board, Library Board Meeting Minutes, September 27, 1958, May 2, 1960; *The Observer*, “Library Sandblasted,” Feb. 18, 1970, 2, “Construction Work at Library,” Jul. 11, 1975, “Library Changes Improve Access,” Jan. 14, 1983, 2; Engineer’s Office, City of La Grande, La Grande Library, 1982, Handicapped Improvements, 1985; Building Condition Assessment, LaGrande Carnegie Library, Richaven Architecture & Preservation, 2020; Art Center East, “Our Story,” accessed Sept. 26, 2025, <https://artcentereast.org/about/>; La Grande City Council Meeting

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Condition

Overall, the La Grande Carnegie Library is in fair to good condition. The roof, windows, and doors are sound and protect the building from weather. The structure has been strengthened by bracing and support projects. The building interior is well-maintained. The exterior has several areas that require maintenance or rehabilitation. Paint is peeling on the cornice, which will deteriorate quickly if not repainted. A crack caused by foundation settling runs from the cornice to the basement level on the west façade; it has apparently been an issue for many decades and may worsen if not addressed. Concrete steps at the main entrance are worn and need to be repaired or replaced. Some exterior bricks show signs of pitting and/or other deterioration and mortar needs repointing in some areas.

Integrity

The integrity of the La Grande Carnegie Library is analyzed below by assessing the seven aspects of integrity that allow a historic property to convey its significance.

Location

The La Grande Carnegie Library has not been moved and thus retains integrity of location.

Design

The most notable alterations to the building's exterior are the replacement of original entrance doors with contemporary doors and the reconfiguration of entrance steps. These alterations likely took place within the period of significance (1913-1969) and do not detract from integrity with regard to Criterion A; as they are fairly limited in area and have not impacted the overall configuration of the primary entrance, they also do not prevent the building from conveying its significance under Criterion C.⁴

The change in use from library to arts center has resulted in post-period of significance interior alterations including removal of the circulation desk and construction of a gift shop. However, as discussed above, most character-defining features of the exterior architecture including form, plan, style, and ornamental details have been retained. Interior features including the basic layout of both the main floor and basement level, original fireplaces, and original woodwork have also been preserved. Because the gift shop was designed with partial-height partitions that are mostly glazed, it does not block views of the ceiling or original windows and allows the original reading room/reference room to retain much of its open-plan feel; the gift shop has therefore had a minor negative impact on integrity of design. The lunchroom within the librarian's office was a secondary space that was not open to the public and research has not revealed any historic-era photographs of the lunchroom. Therefore, removal of lunchroom walls has not affected integrity of design. Reinforcement of the fireplaces was executed without altering visible features and has allowed their continued preservation. The La Grande Carnegie Library thus retains overall integrity of design.

Setting

The setting has changed little. The neighborhood is still characterized by residences that were constructed in the first decades of the twentieth century as well as older churches including the Episcopal Church just south of the library. The La Grande Carnegie Library thus retains integrity of setting.

Materials

Original exterior materials including brick construction, concrete and wood ornamental details, and wood-sash windows have been retained. Sandblasting of bricks resulted in damage to the water resistance of bricks but not a loss of integrity of materials since the brick exterior overall retains its historic appearance despite pitting and limited areas of severe brick damage. Weathering of wood exterior elements (such as

Minutes, May 7, 2008, 5; Kara Brunzell, Personal interview with Art Center East Executive Director Darcy Dolge, September 5, 2025.

⁴ The NRHP-listed Enterprise Carnegie Library has also had a similar reconfiguration of its exterior stairs.

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the cornice) is likewise a condition issue that should be corrected for the long-term preservation of the building, but has not caused a loss of integrity since there has been no alteration or replacement of materials. The loss of the original partially glazed wood double doors and entry stairs has had a negative impact on integrity of materials, but in the context of the building as a whole, this is a relatively minor change. Some original interior features such as original fireplaces and woodwork have also been preserved. The La Grande Carnegie Library thus retains overall integrity of materials.

Workmanship

Original workmanship including has been preserved. Notable elements of workmanship preserved include decorative brickwork, cornice with wood modillions, and the Classical Revival main entrance surround executed in brick and wood. Original interior workmanship is expressed through preserved door casings, window casings, baseboards, columns, and fireplaces. The La Grande Carnegie Library thus retains integrity of workmanship.

Feeling

The character-defining physical features of the property that date from its period of significance, as described above, have not been significantly altered. Taken together, these elements convey the historic feeling of the property. It expresses both the aesthetic and the historic sense of a Carnegie Library from the period of significance. The La Grande Carnegie Library thus retains integrity of feeling.

Association

As described above, the La Grande Carnegie Library retains enough original physical features to easily convey its historic character as a Carnegie Library constructed in the 1910s. It thus retains integrity of association.

The property is easily able to convey its identity as a 1913 Carnegie library through the presence of most of its original character-defining features. It retains all seven aspects of integrity.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

Period of Significance

1913 - 1969

Significant Dates

1913: Date of construction

1969: Deemed structurally deficient and unable to

acquire any additional books

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bunting & Block (Architect)

Rush, George H. (Contractor)

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Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for Criterion A (Education) is from 1913 to 1969, beginning the year the building was constructed for use as a Carnegie Library. The property played a crucial educational and civic role in La Grande for several decades, evolving and growing in response to population expansion and changing community needs (for example, when the children's area was moved downstairs in 1928 to expand the area of the building devoted to library services). Eventually, as the community continued to grow during the postwar era, the building ran out of space to expand as well as the physical capacity to support use by more patrons and storage of additional books; an engineer's report in 1969 warned that the building was structurally deficient and that additional books could no longer be acquired. Although it continued to be used as a library, local discussions about the library after 1969 increasingly focused on the need for the community to develop a new, modern facility. The library had for decades been a source of community pride, but after 1969 it came to be viewed as an outmoded facility that was no longer able to fully serve the community as a library. The period of significance for Criterion A therefore ends in 1969.⁵ The period of significance for Criterion C (Architecture) is 1913, the year the building was completed as a Carnegie Library in the Classical Revival style.⁶

Criteria Considerations:

N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations).

The La Grande Carnegie Library meets the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) threshold for significance at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Education. It also meets the threshold for significance at the local level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. In the area of Education, the free public library represents La Grande's dedication to accessible information and education. The La Grande Carnegie Library was developed after years of effort by active citizens who believed that the local economy and community well-being depended on public investment in education, and it served as the educational center of the city from 1913 through 1969. Library staff worked closely with public schools to assist with their mission of educating children, and the library was an essential self-education resource for adults. Residents depended on the library for information in the form of educational lectures and periodicals as well as books. During its first decades, it was an important source of community pride, and for a time in the 1920s, it had the fifth-highest circulation of any public library in Oregon.⁷ In the area of Architecture, the library is an excellent example of Classical Revival architecture that retains integrity and represents a strong example of the Carnegie Library Program's typology. The building exhibits features recommended by the Carnegie Corporation's own "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings," including a rectangular floor plan with a central exterior staircase leading up to a vestibule with a set of stairs to the main floor circulation area.⁸ In this way, it is representative of the Carnegie Corporation's encouragement of standardized designs and efficient interior layout while allowing for local variation in architectural style and ornament. Furthermore, the building's classically-inspired style, evinced in its symmetrical façade, hipped roof, brick construction, heavy cornice with decorative modillions, and pedimented entrance with decorative surround, is characteristic of the majority of Carnegie libraries in Oregon.⁹ The building, designed by local firm Bunting & Block and completed in 1913, retains a high degree of integrity (as described in Section 7) and is able to convey its significance.

⁵ Greg Anderson, *The Observer*, "Library said lacking years ago," November 24, 1973; Walt Greenwood, *The Observer*, "Library, public facility at top of list of La Grande's needs," January 30, 1974; Dick Cockle, *The Observer*, "Library Death Wish," May 8, 1978; *La Grande Evening Observer*, "Momentum Builds for City Library Project," Mar. 1, 2005, 4.

⁶ *The Observer*, "Library Bids Let to Rush," Jul. 26, 1913, 1, "New Carnegie Library Here," Dec. 20, 1913.

⁷ *The Observer*, "La Grande Library Circulates 90,000 Volumes Each Year," August 31, 1927, 23.

⁸ James Bertram, "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings," 1915.

⁹ Jim Scheppke, "Carnegie Libraries in Oregon," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, accessed Nov. 12, 2025.

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Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

La Grande

The original inhabitants of the La Grande area were the Nez Perce, Umatilla, Cayuse, Walla Walla, and Shoshone people, who came to the Grande Ronde Valley to fish and hunt. The Oregon Trail passed through the Grande Ronde Valley, which was a popular location for French Canadian fur trappers. In 1859, Oregon joined the US just before the start of the Civil War. In 1861, English immigrant Benjamin Brown was the first to establish a permanent residence in what would become the La Grande. He named his settlement Brownsville; the name was changed to La Grande in 1863 when the first post office was built. La Grande was the first permanent town in northeastern Oregon and was incorporated in 1865. La Grande saw a population boom in the 1870s during the Gold Rush and in the 1880s, when the Oregon Railroad extended a line through La Grande. During the 1880s, the fertile land around La Grande was used to grow barley, wheat, and potatoes, which were transported to market on the newly established railroad. In the 1890s, two fires destroyed a large portion of downtown La Grande, and new buildings constructed of local brick replaced the smaller wooden buildings that had burned.¹⁰

By 1903, La Grande had a population of 4,000, and in 1904, it became the permanent seat of Union County. The following years marked an era of change and prosperity in La Grande due to its location at the railroad's division point and its new importance as the county seat. At the same time, as the spirit of Progressive Era reform took hold locally, citizens actively engaged in campaigns for causes including improving education, the prohibition of alcohol, and the development of the downtown business district. In 1911, a new high school building and the Federal Building were constructed, followed by the Carnegie Library in 1913 and a YMCA in 1913–1914. Substantial downtown commercial buildings were also constructed during this period: downtown La Grande was lined with hotels, a creamery, a dance hall, a movie theater, churches, banks, restaurants, and more. La Grande further consolidated its position as a regional transportation, shipping, and commercial center after Highway 30 was built through La Grande in 1923. Road development stimulated the local adoption of automobiles and the development of automobile-related businesses. In 1929, Eastern Oregon Normal School, which later became Eastern Oregon University, was established in La Grande, making it a regional educational center. By 1930, the population of La Grande was approximately 8,000. At the time, many people worked in the local beet sugar factory, sawmills, and mines. From the 1950s to 1970s, La Grande continued to develop as a college town with a strong arts and theater scene centered around the Elgin Opera House and the Liberty Theater. By 1980, the population of La Grande reached approximately 11,000.¹¹

From 2010 to 2020, the population of La Grande has remained at approximately 13,000 residents. Today, La Grande is known for Eastern Oregon University and the recreational activities in the surrounding Wallowa Mountains and Blue Mountains. Cattle ranching and lumber are still prominent enterprises in La Grande.¹²

Carnegie Library Program

Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919) was born in Scotland and immigrated to the US with his parents at the age of 12. He got his start working for a cotton mill but soon found success as a bond salesman. Later, he worked for

¹⁰ Oregon Theater Project, "La Grande, OR," accessed Sept. 8, 2025, <https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/grande-ronde-valley-c1884/>; Rebecca Hartman, "La Grande," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, May 18, 2023; Bernal D. Hug, *History of Union County, Oregon*, La Grande: Eastern Oregon Review, 1961, 194-208.

¹¹ National Register of Historic Places, "The La Grande Commercial Historic District," prepared by Donna Hartmans, Sally Donovan, & Dr. Joby Patterson, July 23, 2000; Rebecca Hartman, "La Grande," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, May 18, 2023.

¹² Rebecca Hartman, "La Grande," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, May 18, 2023; United States Census Bureau, "La Grande," 2010-2020, accessed Sept. 26, 2025.

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the Pennsylvania Railroad as a telegraph operator, where he was soon promoted, eventually becoming a successful executive. With the wealth he accumulated, he built his first steel mill in 1872 and formed the Carnegie Steel Company in 1892 after purchasing additional plants. In 1901, Carnegie sold the company to J. P. Morgan's US Steel Corporation, forming the first billion-dollar company in the United States. After selling his company, he became the richest American for a time. He devoted a large amount of his life to philanthropy, with a focus on founding libraries. In fact, he donated nearly 90 percent of his fortune (\$350 million) to charities by the time of his death in 1919. Andrew Carnegie was the president of the Carnegie Corporation, which he formed in 1911 to administer his philanthropic library grants. Andrew Carnegie earned the title of "Patron Saint of Libraries" and dedicated the later years of his life to the construction of free public libraries.¹³

Carnegie considered libraries to be a source of education and the center of a community. The Carnegie library program (active from 1886 to 1917) was based on Carnegie's beliefs that free libraries were an important community tool to encourage individual self-improvement, and that this form of public educational infrastructure could change lives. As the program gained steam, the City Beautiful movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was based on similar paternalistic ideals, was becoming influential in the US. The proponents of City Beautiful urban design focused on the beautification of urban spaces through the construction of monumental classically inspired architecture. Grand public spaces would attract the wealthy, who would invest in communities and act as moral examples, encouraging the poor to improve themselves. This movement dovetailed with Carnegie's views about philanthropists' moral superiority and his belief that their financial success demonstrated that the wealthy were qualified to plan and administer the affairs of the working classes. Although a movement was already underway in the US to provide free libraries, Carnegie's program accelerated the trend; before receiving Carnegie grants most library systems were volunteer-operated and dependent on donations. Carnegie grants (which mandated local public investment) created lasting, publicly financed local library systems. A community applying for a Carnegie library grant needed to ensure that the library would benefit the community, that its use would be free to everyone, and that its operations could be funded by local government.¹⁴

Carnegie's philanthropic efforts were accelerating by the final years of the nineteenth century and intensified further after he sold his company in 1901; that year, he hired a team of architects to provide advice on library design. As Carnegie began funding a much larger number of libraries (over 200 in 1903 alone), individual grants became smaller, and most twentieth century Carnegie Libraries were either branch libraries or in small towns. The Carnegie Library Program encouraged architects to create economically efficient designs "consistent with good taste," which became more standardized as the program grew. Carnegie's secretary, James Bertram, was deeply involved in grant approvals, architectural plans, and upholding the standards of Carnegie libraries, and appears to have been influential in the formation of Carnegie's funding principles. About 1904, Bertram began reviewing the building plans for libraries that exceeded their initial budgets and by 1908 his prior approval was required for all Carnegie Library building plans. Bertram developed a belief that cost overruns were caused by improper planning, and the push for standardization was largely based on a desire for economic efficiency and consultation of with library experts.¹⁵

¹³ Carnegie Corporation of New York, "Andrew Carnegie's Library Legacy: A Timeline," Jan. 8, 2025, accessed Jul. 16, 2025, <https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/andrew-carnegies-library-legacy/rk>; National Park Service, "Carnegie Libraries: The Future Made Bright (Teaching with Historic Places)," accessed Jul. 16, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/carnegie-libraries-the-future-made-bright-teaching-with-historic-places.htm>; George S. Bobinski, "Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development," *ALA Bulletin* 62, no. 11 (1968): 1361–67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25698025>.

¹⁴ National Register of Historic Places, "Enterprise Public Library," prepared by Sally Donovan, Sep. 30, 2013, 11; National Register of Historic Places, "Carnegie Libraries of Washington State," prepared by James H. Vandermeer, Dec. 31, 1984; Abigail Ayres Van Slyck, *Free to all : Carnegie libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 21.

¹⁵ Van Slyck, 1995, 22, 34-36; George Bobinski, "Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development," *ALA Bulletin* 62, no. 11 (1968): 1361–67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25698025>.

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In 1911, Bertram wrote a pamphlet called “Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings,” which formalized the Carnegie Library program that had been under gradual development for a decade. Since the program had a strict funding formula that provided grants for the physical plant but not operations, Bertram was adamant that layout must be functional and space must be used economically. Initially a single page of text, “Notes” was repeatedly amended over several years until it included six schematic building plans lettered A through F. No suggested elevations were provided, and exterior architectural details were left to each community and its architect as long as ornament did not interfere with “keeping to a plain, dignified structure.” Acceptable parameters for plan, form, and massing, meanwhile, were extremely specific. Bertram asserted that the best results required a one-story building above a raised basement; the basement would be about 4 feet below grade with 9- to 10-foot ceilings, and the main floor would have 12- to 15-foot ceilings. A small entry vestibule should lead to a large reading room subdivided by bookcases, with ample light provided by windows on all four upper walls. The main floor would be devoted to reading and checking out books, while the basement was for a lecture room, heating plant, restrooms, and other functional requirements.¹⁶

The Carnegie Program amplified the changes in library design and operations underway during the late nineteenth century as the “modern library idea” to supplant the “treasure house” library in which books were carefully guarded. Modern library proponents advocated for democratization of the library by substituting public financial support for private charity, by including children, and by allowing readers to free access to books (in contrast to closed-stack libraries in which books were delivered by librarians). In 1890, the Cleveland Public Library began experimenting with open shelves; by the end of the decade, more libraries had adopted the practice, and influential library directors like John Cotton Dana were promoting open shelves as essential to the modern library. By the turn of the century, facilities for children were viewed as an essential element of a public library. In 1902, *Architectural Review* published a survey of library design that discussed 67 libraries that were either under development or had been recently completed. The survey showed that only about 25% of all new libraries were designed to allow for full public access to books in contrast to 40% of new Carnegie libraries. Carnegie Libraries were also more likely to include children’s rooms than libraries funded by other sources. All the plans featured in Bertram’s “Notes” featured open reading rooms subdivided only by bookshelves or glass partitions; Bertram specifically mentioned reading space for children as an essential element of a public library and included children’s reading rooms in all but his two smallest library plans. For Bertram, open shelves were preferable because the self-service concept allowed small libraries with limited budgets to operate with a single librarian.¹⁷

Although Bertram did not express style preferences, much twentieth-century Carnegie library architecture (like that of all US libraries constructed during the same era) is classically inspired. (In the 1902 survey of libraries, 57 of 67 featured classical details.) This may have been a response to Bertram’s promotion of architectural dignity in his guidelines, although Carnegie library scholar Abigail Ayres Van Slyck has argued that the “shift toward classicism is more accurately explained as the Ecole des Beaux-Arts response to the new emphasis on the public nature of the library.” Classical Revival architecture (popular between 1895 and 1950) expressed monumental formality inspired by Greek temples, utilizing symmetrical façades with centered entrances. Exterior decorative features included classical columns and pilasters, cornice modillions and dentil moulding, decorative door surrounds, and pedimented gables at front entrances. Materials varied, although Classical Revival banks and government buildings (including libraries) were typically masonry. A majority of buildings funded by the Carnegie Library Program are constructed of brick, although materials were not specified by the

¹⁶ James Bertram, “Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings,” 1915; National Register of Historic Places, “Enterprise Public Library,” Sep. 30, 2013, 11; National Register of Historic Places, “Carnegie Libraries of Washington State,” Dec. 31, 1984; George Bobinski, “Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development,” *ALA Bulletin* 62, no. 11 (1968): 1361–67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25698025>; Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, “Classical Revival Style 1895 – 1950,” accessed Nov. 11, 2025, <https://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/classical-revival.html>.

¹⁷ Van Slyck, 1995, 26-27, 29-37.

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program. Many feature exterior stairs leading from street level to a centered primary entrance on the main floor.¹⁸

Oregon Carnegie Libraries

The La Grande Carnegie Library was constructed in 1913 as one of 1,689 Carnegie Libraries built in the US, 32 of which were constructed in Oregon between 1901 and 1921 (one was a university library and the others were public libraries). Between 1907 and 1915, nine small communities in Eastern Oregon received library grants from the Carnegie Corporation. More than half of the Carnegie libraries in Oregon (including the La Grande Carnegie Library) were funded between 1910 and 1915; grants ranged from \$5,000 to \$27,000 dollars during this era.¹⁹

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were no tax-supported public libraries in Oregon. Women's clubs had begun rallying to pass a law to enable tax support in the late nineteenth century. In 1901, a law was successfully passed that allowed cities in Oregon to form library boards to impose property taxes to finance public libraries. The first Carnegie library in Oregon was established in 1904 in the city of Eugene, due to the efforts of the local women's club, the Fortnightly Club. Preexisting public libraries, such as the Multnomah County Library, used Carnegie grants to expand their facilities. A review of available contemporary and historic photographs of Oregon's Carnegie Libraries reveals a diverse collection of building forms and styles; as a group, they demonstrate Bertram's flexibility regarding architectural style.²⁰ A majority (roughly two-thirds) of Oregon Carnegie libraries were constructed of brick, and a similar proportion feature some type of classically inspired architecture (expressed through a range of styles including Beaux-Arts, Colonial Revival, Greek Revival, and Georgian as well as Classical Revival). Two of the "Classical Revival" buildings (Union and Grants Pass) were so nearly devoid of ornament they are not strongly evocative of any architectural style. A substantial proportion (about 21%) of the buildings exhibit Mediterranean Revival or Spanish Revival architecture, and there are also three examples of Tudor Revival, one Prairie style example, and one Craftsman style example. One building is constructed of stone, and another ten are clad in stucco. Only half of the buildings feature Bertram's preferred massing (i.e. a centered set of steps leading from the street to the first floor, which is atop a raised basement). Thus, although brick construction, a massed plan with raised first floor, and Classical Revival style are often assumed to be three nearly ubiquitous elements of a unified Carnegie Library typology, fewer than half of Oregon Carnegie Libraries exhibited all three features. The La Grande Carnegie Library, with its brick construction, raised first floor massing, and Classical Revival architecture, is as typical of the program as any individual library in Oregon can be said to be. It was one of three Carnegie libraries completed in 1913 (14 more were constructed over the next eight years) and its \$12,500 funding from the Carnegie Corporation was roughly average for Oregon. The Grants Pass Public Library was the last Carnegie library built in Oregon in 1921, marking the end of the Carnegie Library Program in the state.²¹

La Grande Carnegie Library

In 1911, citizens of La Grande proposed the construction of a public library to their city council. With support from local business owners and Mayor A. L. Richardson, the council appointed a five-member library board that applied for the Carnegie Corporation Library Program. Local attorney George T. Cochran, one of the original board members, would serve on the library board from its establishment into the 1950s. Previously, the only library in the city had been a library collection in the Commercial Club building located at 1107 N Avenue

¹⁸ Van Slyck, 1995, 27-30.

¹⁹ *The Observer*, "Library Bids Let to Rush," Jul. 26, 1913, 1, "New Carnegie Library Here," Dec. 20, 1913; Jim Schepcke, "Carnegie Libraries in Oregon," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, accessed Nov. 12, 2025; National Register of Historic Places, "Enterprise Public Library," Sep. 30, 2013, 15.

²⁰ Where available, historic postcards, contemporary Google Street photos, individual NRHP Nomination forms, and Oregon State Forms have been consulted to determine construction year, style, and materials. However, because some Oregon Carnegie Libraries have been demolished and because older nomination and documentation forms sometimes lacked detail, not every fact about the libraries funded by Carnegie within the state can be definitively verified.

²¹ Jim Schepcke, "Carnegie Libraries in Oregon," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, accessed Nov. 12, 2025.

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in downtown La Grande (still extant). After the Commercial Club sold the building, the collection was relocated to the basement of Honan Hall located at 1705 Fifth Street (demolished in 1985), which the city rented.²²

The La Grande Carnegie Library was designed by Bunting & Block, who had recently designed the Carnegie library in Enterprise (about 60 miles to the east of La Grande). In many respects, Bunting & Block closely followed Bertram's design guidelines. The building featured a main floor above a raised basement accessed via a central exterior staircase leading to a small vestibule a few steps below the main floor. Windows on all four upper walls provided ample light to the main floor while lower walls were solid so bookshelves could be placed against them. The interior layout followed the broad outlines of "Plan A," one of the six layouts recommended by James Bertram in "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings" (**Figure 7**), with a children's area on one side of the central reading room and an adult area on the other, separated by a central circulation desk with a reference room behind it. A meeting room, boiler room, and restrooms were located in the basement. Bunting & Block departed from official guidance in subtle ways that apparently did not interfere with grant approval. Rather than a strictly rectangular building plan, Bunting & Block designed a plan in which the front section of the building was slightly wider than the rear section. Interior stairs were sited at the back of the building rather than adjacent to the main entrance as illustrated in "Plan A," and, rather than having a completely open-plan reading room as recommended, the enclosed staff room was in the northeast corner of the main floor.²³

Like the Enterprise Carnegie Library, the building was constructed of brick. Construction cost \$12,500 and was executed by local contractor George H. Rush. Construction of the La Grande Carnegie Library was completed in December 1913, and its formal opening was celebrated on March 14, 1914. The Carnegie Corporation required the city to provide at least \$2,500 yearly funding. The first librarian was Iva Emily Head. She soon resigned and was replaced by Jacqueline Noel. Five small traveling libraries were managed by the La Grande Library. The library's function as a site for social gatherings, community events, recreation, and civic engagement may have been as significant as its role in education. The Neighborhood Club (a local women's club that met weekly for educational lectures, planned social events, and undertook civic improvement projects) spent about \$400 to furnish the basement meeting room, and began holding their meetings there as soon as the library opened in 1914. The club would also host events like flower shows at the library. Evening lectures, such as a series of talks on Christianity in 1920, were held at the library, and alumni associations and other groups would meet there. In 1919, the Library Board spearheaded an effort to create a war memorial by printing newspaper advertisements requesting Union County to submit the names of every local man who had served in World War I to the Library.²⁴

In 1920, Stella Ingle was the president of the library board and Bessie Dwyer was the librarian. By early 1923, Edith Pickett was librarian; she had one full-time and one part-time assistant. Mabel Doty, who became librarian in August 1923, served in the post for decades, retiring in 1959. Blanche Herzinger (who worked in the library for 47 years), was a library assistant by 1923. Originally, the adult reading room was on the east side of the main floor and the children's area near the fireplace. The library was typically open from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM daily with shorter hours and no circulation desk on Sunday. By 1927, yearly circulation had increased to 90,000 volumes, up from fewer than 17,000 in 1914. Library patronage continued to grow steadily, and by 1931 yearly circulation was 121,000 (an increase of 13,000 over 1930). By this time, there were four full-time librarians including Doty, and the facility was used to its full capacity, often having twice as many patrons as

²² *The Observer*, "La Grande Library Has Enjoyed Rapid Growth," May 26, 1923, "La Grande Public Library to Honor George Cochran," October 3, 1951, 1.

²³ Bertram, "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings," 1915, 4.

²⁴ *The Observer*, "Library Bids Let to Rush," Jul. 26, 1913, 1, "New Carnegie Library Here," Dec. 20, 1913, 13, La Grande Library Has Enjoyed Rapid Growth," May 26, 1923, "Library at Enterprise," Nov. 20, 1913, "Society," March 14, 1914, 8, "Lectures are Well Attended," November 9, 1920 1, "To the Citizens of Union County," February 27, 1919, 6.

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chairs. La Grande Public Library was the 12th largest library in the state and ranked fifth in circulation during the late 1920s.²⁵

In the 1950s, the library employed six library assistants and a janitor, all hired by the library board. During this era, misbehaving teenagers who spent their evenings in the library became a serious issue, which was solved by asking young people to leave at 8:00 PM and allowing adult patrons to stay until 9:00 PM. Apparently, use was so heavy that high school and junior high students were asked not to bring their textbooks to the library or to use it as a study hall. Teenagers were also responsible for minor acts of vandalism; one high school student was punished by spending his Saturdays assisting with library maintenance after he removed bricks from the exterior near the entrance. Barbara J. Elam (1932 – 2014) was a librarian from 1956 until 1995, starting as an assistant in the children's library before being promoted to children's librarian and then city librarian in 1966. She was born in La Grande and got her teaching degree there before starting to work at the library. She went back to school for a master's degree in library science when she was tapped to run the library. Elam became a fixture in local public life, consistently advocating for the disbursement of funds for building repairs and improvements to library service.²⁶

The La Grande Carnegie Library's role in supplementing the public schools as an educational institution was crucial in an era when many people could not afford to buy books. For its first few years of operations, a single librarian was responsible for the entire facility; operations were therefore ad hoc and lacked the management structure and formal planning that characterizes better funded contemporary public libraries. In 1919, the public library began cleaning, organizing, and storing school district libraries during summer vacation. Between 1925 and 1927, the library opened branch libraries in three remote elementary schools. Local parent-teacher associations purchased bookshelves, and a librarian from La Grande Library would open each branch library to local children and adults one afternoon each week. During the 1920s, story hour for children was led by library assistant Gertrude Wagoner. The children's program during this era included librarian visits to classrooms to encourage children to apply for library cards, Saturday morning story time, and a mimeographed publication called "White Rabbit" (written by Doty and illustrated by Herzinger) that informed children about available books. Children's book week was celebrated each November with a daily story hour, prizes for each child who read a book during the week, and activities like an imaginary railway trip through Europe for older children. After the Neighborhood Club outgrew its basement meeting room and began meeting at a local hotel in 1928, Doty and Herzinger personally moved the children's library to the basement. A community fundraising campaign that included donations from children had provided funds for a carpet and other necessary furnishings; when it opened on May 23, 92 young patrons checked out 113 books between 1:00 PM and 6:00 PM.²⁷

In 1940, federal funds allowed the library to institute a bookmobile; its 1,000 books and two librarians stopped at remote rural schools, granges, and post offices in Union County. The program was only operated for about a year due to a cessation in funding. By the late 1950s, the Rural School Board was providing \$400 a year to La Grande Library for books in its rural school collection.²⁸ A similar program funded by the state began operating in the early 1960s. By the mid-1940s, library had added a Spring Book Festival to its children's programming as well as a summer reading program intended to mitigate learning loss during school vacation. The fall

²⁵ *The Observer*, "La Grande Library Circulates 90,000 Volumes Each Year," August 31, 1927, 23, "Library Report Shows Big Gain," January 14, 1932, 5.

²⁶ *The Observer*, "Librarian leaves world of books," January 6, 1969, 5; *La Grande Evening Observer*, "New Books at Library," Sept. 4, 1914, 8; *The Oregonian*, "Illness Takes Field Auditor," Dec. 28, 1943, 11; *Oregon Review*, "Library Board is Reorganized," Jan. 14, 1920; La Grande Library Board, Meeting Minutes, December 12, 1958, Aug. 3, 1959; *Oregon Review*, "Ordinance Available," Jan. 2, 1975; *La Grande Evening Observer*, "Long-Serving Librarian," Sept. 15, 2006, 20.

²⁷ *The Observer*, "4564 Books in Library," January 14, 1919, 6, "Children's Book Week Will Begin Sunday," November 5, 1926, 4, August 31, 1927, 23, "92 Children at Library," May 24, 1928, 5,

²⁸ La Grande Library Board minutes from 1957 to 1963 are available to shed light on library programs and activities for this period. Many facts about library operations and programs are unknown since available sources are limited.

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children's book week also evolved over the decades. By 1966, it included visits to the library by elementary school classes.²⁹

Maintenance and operations were initially the responsibility of the city; Union County began contributing in 1920, but its financial sponsorship was erratic, and the library struggled financially. During periods when the County did not provide financial support, patrons who lived outside city limits had to pay an annual subscription fee to use the facility, which many people did. From 1945 to 1955, the county provided \$1,000 a year; that sum was doubled in 1956. In 1961, the La Grande Carnegie Library was removed from local control. From that time until 1964, the state funded the library as part of an experimental program to create regional library systems. The budget increased over time: in the late 1960s the County provided \$10,000 while the City provided \$37,000; by 1973-1974, the budget had grown to over \$81,000.³⁰

By the late 1960s, the building was insufficient in size for the population it served and the number of books it needed to hold. In 1969, engineer Gilbert Meigs submitted a report to the City Manager that, according to Greg Anderson of *The Observer*, "painted a dismal picture." The building was showing serious signs of wear including sagging floors and cracked ceilings. Redistribution of bookcases had mitigated the safety risks and reduced the unevenness of the floors, but the report unequivocally recommended that loads on the main level could not be increased, stating that "no additional books should be acquired for the library unless some of the shelved books are disposed of." This report marks a turning point in staff and community attitudes about the La Grande Carnegie Library, which was increasingly viewed as an out-of-date liability rather than a symbol of community pride.³¹

After 1969, local newspaper stories about the facility highlighted its inadequacy and deficiencies. Although it would be many years before funding was secured to replace the facility, a new library was a community goal by the early 1970s. Another engineer's report in 1971 found that the roof was not strong enough to hold large snow loads. By 1973, even Barbara Elam, who had long been the biggest library booster, was advocating development of a new facility, arguing that the old building was too small and worn out. The La Grande Community Services Steering Committee put a new library at the top of their list of public needs in 1974. In 1977, La Grande City Council appointed a citizen committee to assess the need for a new library facility. In 1978 Elam reiterated the insufficiency of available interior space, stating that the size of the community called for a 20,000-square-foot library rather than the existing 8,000-square-foot building. She also highlighted its structural flaws, lack of parking, and failure to meet recently established federal accessibility requirements.³²

By 1990, leaks had rendered some parts of the basement unusable. Library staff struggled with overcrowded bookshelves in a facility designed for a much smaller community. In 2005, the La Grande Carnegie Library was closed in anticipation of the development of a new library facility. The arts organization took over the La Grande Carnegie Library building in 2008.³³

Bunting & Block, Architects

Chauncey Earl Bunting (1893–1981) was born in Illinois in 1893. He received his engineering degree from the University of California in 1912. The Carnegie Libraries in Enterprise and La Grande were the start of his career, as he was only 20 at the time. He married Pauline Newton and started the firm of Bunting & Block in

²⁹ *The Observer*, "Bookmobile to Go on Trial Service in Union County during Summer," May 17, 1940, 1, "La Grande Library Plans Festival," May 10, 1946, 3, "Children's Book Week at library," November 15, 1966, 5; Library Board, Library Board Meeting Minutes, May 24, 1957, October 20, 1958.

³⁰ *La Grande Evening Observer*, "LG Library: Who Should Pay?" Nov. 27, 1973.

³¹ Greg Anderson, *The Observer*, "Library said lacking years ago," November 24, 1973.

³² Greg Anderson, *The Observer*, "Library said lacking years ago," November 24, 1973; Walt Greenwood, "Library, public facility at top of list of La Grande's needs," *The Observer*, January 30, 1974; Dick Cockle, *The Observer*, "Library Death Wish," May 8, 1978; *La Grande Evening Observer*, "Momentum Builds for City Library Project," Mar. 1, 2005, 4.

³³ *La Grande Evening Observer*, "Momentum Builds for City Library Project," Mar. 1, 2005, 4; "Honored Artist Show Continues," Sept. 1, 2014, 6.

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1913, when both library buildings were designed. The firm was headquartered at 1309 Adams Avenue in La Grande. In 1914, Bunting & Block was dissolved, and Bunting began working for the Conway Company. Later that year, he started the Shipman-Bunting Company with R. Von Shipman. In 1922, he formed the firm of Earl Bunting and Associates in Portland. By 1941, Bunting had left architecture and was president of the O'Sullivan Rubber Corporation in Virginia. From 1946 to 1954, Bunting was the president of the National Association of Manufacturers.³⁴

Milton Samuel Block (also "Bloch") (1883–1960) was born to German parents and raised in La Grande, Oregon. He and his wife, Oma A. Richardson (1883–1969), had two sons and one daughter. After Bunting & Block was dissolved, Block worked as an architectural draftsman for the US Navy. Later in his career, he worked on public school design in Portland.³⁵

The only known works of the short-lived partnership were the La Grande Carnegie Library (1913), the Enterprise Carnegie Library at 101 NE 1st Street in Enterprise (1913), and the YMCA at 510 Franklin Street SE in La Grande (1913–1914). The Enterprise Carnegie library (designed and constructed at almost the same time as the La Grande Carnegie Library) is similar in style, form, and plan to the La Grande Carnegie Library, although it is a smaller building since it received a much smaller grant. It features brick construction, a modified rectangular plan, and Classical Revival architectural details including a pedimented main entrance. The decorative treatment of its lower main floor walls is very similar to its counterpart in La Grande, with stone rather than concrete accents set within a geometric brickwork pattern. Many design elements also conform to "Plan A": symmetrical massing, a centered entrance, main floor above a raised basement, high main-floor windows that allow space for bookshelves, a small interior vestibule, and an open reading room visible from a central circulation desk. Historic postcards depicting the La Grande YMCA (apparently demolished in the 1970s) also reveal a Classical Revival brick building. It is two stories above a raised basement, much larger than either library. It has a heavy cornice with modillions and a pedimented main entrance like the La Grande Carnegie Library, while its corner quoins echo the design of the Enterprise Carnegie Library.

George H. Rush

George Howard Rush (1872–1919) was born in West Virginia in 1872. He married Clara B. McPherson (1875–1910) in 1894, and they had four children while living in Virginia. There, he worked as a carpenter before becoming a contractor. In 1910, Clara Rush died, and George Rush moved his family to Nampa, Idaho. There, he married Clara's younger sister, Essye McPherson, before moving again to La Grande. Rush worked as a contractor in Oregon from 1911 until his death in 1919, when his car was crushed by a train in Baker, Oregon. As a contractor, he specialized in brick masonry.³⁶

Rush had a relatively short career in Eastern Oregon. In addition to the Carnegie Library, he is known to have constructed Ellensburg High School at South Sprague Street between First Avenue and Capital Street in Ellensburg, Washington (1912). The building has been demolished, but it appears to have been a Classical Revival brick building.

Conclusion: Evaluation of Significance

Criterion A

The La Grande Carnegie Library is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Education for its strong association with the advancement of public education in La Grande during the early twentieth century. Constructed in 1913 with funding from the Carnegie Corporation, the library represents the nationwide Carnegie Library Program, which sought to expand educational opportunities for working- and middle-class

³⁴ *Coos Bay Times*, "New Firm is Formed Here," Sept. 11, 1914, 8; *Sunday Oregonian*, "Former Oregon Man Named Manufacturer Group Head," Dec. 22, 1946, 25.

³⁵ *La Grande Evening Observer*, "Receives Appointment," Nov. 12, 1917, 5.

³⁶ *Sunday Oregonian*, "Obituary," Sept. 21, 1919, 13; United States Federal Census, Virginia, "George H. Rush," 1900; *Idaho Statesman*, "Births, Marriages and Deaths," Apr. 6, 1911, 3.

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people who would have been unable to purchase their own books through free public access to books and other educational resources. It also represents the Carnegie Corporation's partnership with small cities in Eastern Oregon, nine of which received its library grants between 1907 and 1915.³⁷ The establishment of the La Grande Carnegie Library reflects the community's commitment to intellectual improvement and the democratization of knowledge during the Progressive Era. Public education was supported by the library with branch libraries in remote schools, librarian visits to classrooms, story times for children, and summer reading programs. The library was developed within an era of economic prosperity and population growth in La Grande, supported by industries such as the Oregon Railroad, beet sugar production, and timber milling along the Grande Ronde River. In this context, the library emerged as a key educational and cultural institution that complemented the city's expanding public school system. The library's creation was the result of local efforts to provide residents with access to information and educational materials comparable to those in larger cities. Throughout the twentieth century, the La Grande Carnegie Library functioned as an essential public resource for formal and informal education. It offered collections and programs that served students, teachers, and general readers, reinforcing the community's emphasis on learning and self-improvement. The La Grande Carnegie Library, a state-of-the-art facility when it was developed in 1913, was an important source of civic pride for decades. It was a social hub that hosted club meetings and community events in addition to its educational offerings. The library continued to adapt to changing educational needs by expanding its services, collections, and staff to serve the growing population up until 1969, when the building could no longer sustain the weight of new book acquisitions or expand to adequately support its users.³⁸

Physical features of the building that illustrate its historic purpose and function include the high placement of its main floor windows, which are designed to flood the reading rooms with light while leaving ample blank wall space for bookshelves; the open interior plan, which was designed to allow a single librarian to supervise adult and children's reading rooms; and the basement location of restrooms, storage rooms, and the original meeting room.

The building remained in continuous use as a public library until 2005 and has since served the community as an arts and cultural center. Its sustained use for educational purposes highlights its historic role as an intellectual center in La Grande. Therefore, the La Grande Carnegie Library is significant as a local manifestation of the broader Carnegie library movement and as a symbol of La Grande's dedication to public education and lifelong learning.

Criterion C

The La Grande Carnegie Library is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture as an excellent example of a Carnegie public library designed in the Classical Revival style. The La Grande Carnegie Library is a strong example of a Carnegie Library; its massing, form, fenestration pattern, centered entrance with stairs from street level, and interior layout reflect the influence of the Carnegie Corporation. Although there is no unified typology for the program (which allowed wide latitude in architectural style), the building exhibits features recommended for Carnegie-funded libraries as described in the Carnegie Corporation's "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings." In particular, the La Grande Library is similar to Carnegie Corporation's "Plan A" (**Figure 7**), which includes a rectangular floor plan with a central exterior staircase leading up to a vestibule with a set of stairs to the main floor circulation area. The open shelves and reading rooms on either side of the circulation desk and the location of most support spaces in the basement also specifically conform to the requirements of the program's design plan, which prioritized efficient function as a library over aesthetics and all other concerns. The library retains character-defining features of the Classical Revival style in its symmetrical façade, hip roof, brick construction, heavy cornice with decorative modillions, and pedimented

³⁷ Jim Schepke, "Carnegie Libraries in Oregon," *Oregon Encyclopedia*, accessed Nov. 12, 2025; National Register of Historic Places, "Enterprise Public Library," Sep. 30, 2013, 15.

³⁸ Greg Anderson, *The Observer*, "Library said lacking years ago," November 24, 1973; Walt Greenwood, "Library, public facility at top of list of La Grande's needs," *The Observer*, January 30, 1974; Dick Cockle, *The Observer*, "Library Death Wish," May 8, 1978; *La Grande Evening Observer*, "Momentum Builds for City Library Project," Mar. 1, 2005, 4.

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entrance with decorative surround. Classically inspired architecture was used for several important civic and government buildings constructed in La Grande during early 1910s: the city's elegant Colonial Revival Post Office/Federal building (1000 Adams Avenue) and the Classical Revival La Grande High School (no longer extant) were both built in 1911; the Carnegie Library and YMCA (no longer extant) were completed in 1913 and 1914. All four buildings featured brick construction, massed rectangular plans, heavy cornices with decorative modillions, and quoins or rustication; the high school, library, and YMCA all shared pedimented entrances flanked by pilasters or columns. The La Grande Carnegie Library thus exhibits the functional elements dictated by the Carnegie Program as well as the local preference for Classical public architecture. The La Grande Carnegie Library is the only building of this type in the community, and it retains sufficient integrity to communicate its association with the Carnegie Library program.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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"Library Bids Let to Rush." Jul. 26, 1913, 1.

"New Carnegie Library Here." Dec. 20, 1913, 13.

"Society," March 14, 1914, 8.

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"Greenhouse To Be Started." Mar. 30, 1918, 4.

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“Lectures are Well Attended,” November 9, 1920 1.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1	<u>45.325309°</u>	<u>-118.096677°</u>	3	<u></u>	<u></u>
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude
2	<u></u>	<u></u>	4	<u></u>	<u></u>
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated area coincides with Union County Tax Lot 3500, further defined as Township 3 South, Range 38 East, Section 8 in the 1963 USGS Topographic Map La Grande Quadrangle. The tax lot measures 180' long (east-west) and 70' wide (north-south), and includes the library, lawns, and walkways.³⁹

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated area covers the entire tax lot, which has been in continuous ownership by the City of La Grande from the building's completion in 1913 through the present. The tax lot boundary has not changed since the end of the period of significance.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kara Brunzell (Principal) & Tatyana Dunn (Historian) date March 19, 2026
organization Brunzell Historical telephone
street & number 1613 B Street email Kara.brunzell@brunzellhistorical.com
city or town Napa state CA zip code 94559

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Regional Location Map**
- **Local Location Map**
- **Tax Lot Map**
- **Site Plan**
- **Floor Plans (As Applicable)**
- **Photo Location Map** (Include for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map and insert immediately after the photo log and before the list of figures).

³⁹ Union County Assessor Data accessed April 2026, Map Number 03S38E08BB03500.

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Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: La Grande Carnegie Library
City or Vicinity: La Grande
County: Union **State:** Oregon
Photographer: Kara Brunzell
Date Photographed: September 4-5, 2025

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- Photograph 1 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0001
View of north (main) façade, looking south.
- Photograph 2 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0002
View of north façade entrance detail, looking south.
- Photograph 3 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0003
View of west façade, looking east.
- Photograph 4 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0004
View of east and north façades, looking southwest.
- Photograph 5 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0005
View of south façade, looking northeast.
- Photograph 6 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0006
View of interior vestibule and main entrance, looking north.
- Photograph 7 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0007
View of interior main level, looking west.
- Photograph 8 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0008
View of interior main level with gift shop, looking south.
- Photograph 9 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0009
View of former librarian's office at main level, looking northwest.
- Photograph 10 of 10:** OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0010
View of former children's room at basement level, looking northwest.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington

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List of Figures

(Resize, compact, and paste images of maps and historic documents in this section. Place captions, with figure numbers above each image. Orient maps so that north is at the top of the page, all document should be inserted with the top toward the top of the page.)

Figure 1: La Grande, Oregon, USGS Topographic Map Enterprise Quadrangle

Figure 2: Local Location Map

Figure 3: Tax Lot Map

Figure 4: Site Plan

Figure 5: Main Floor Plan

Figure 6: Basement Floor Plan

Figure 7: Carnegie Corporation "Plan A" Floor Plan (1911)

Figure 8: Historic photographs of La Grande Carnegie Library exterior (c1914)

Figure 9: Historic photograph of La Grande Carnegie Library exterior (c1940)

Figure 10: Historic photographs of La Grande Carnegie Library exterior (c1970)

Figure 11: Historic photograph of La Grande Carnegie Library interior, 1920s

Figure 12: Library interior showing replacement circulation desk, c1960

Figure 13: Library interior showing west reading room and fireplace, c1960

Figure 14: Historic photographs of La Grande Carnegie Library interior, 1970s

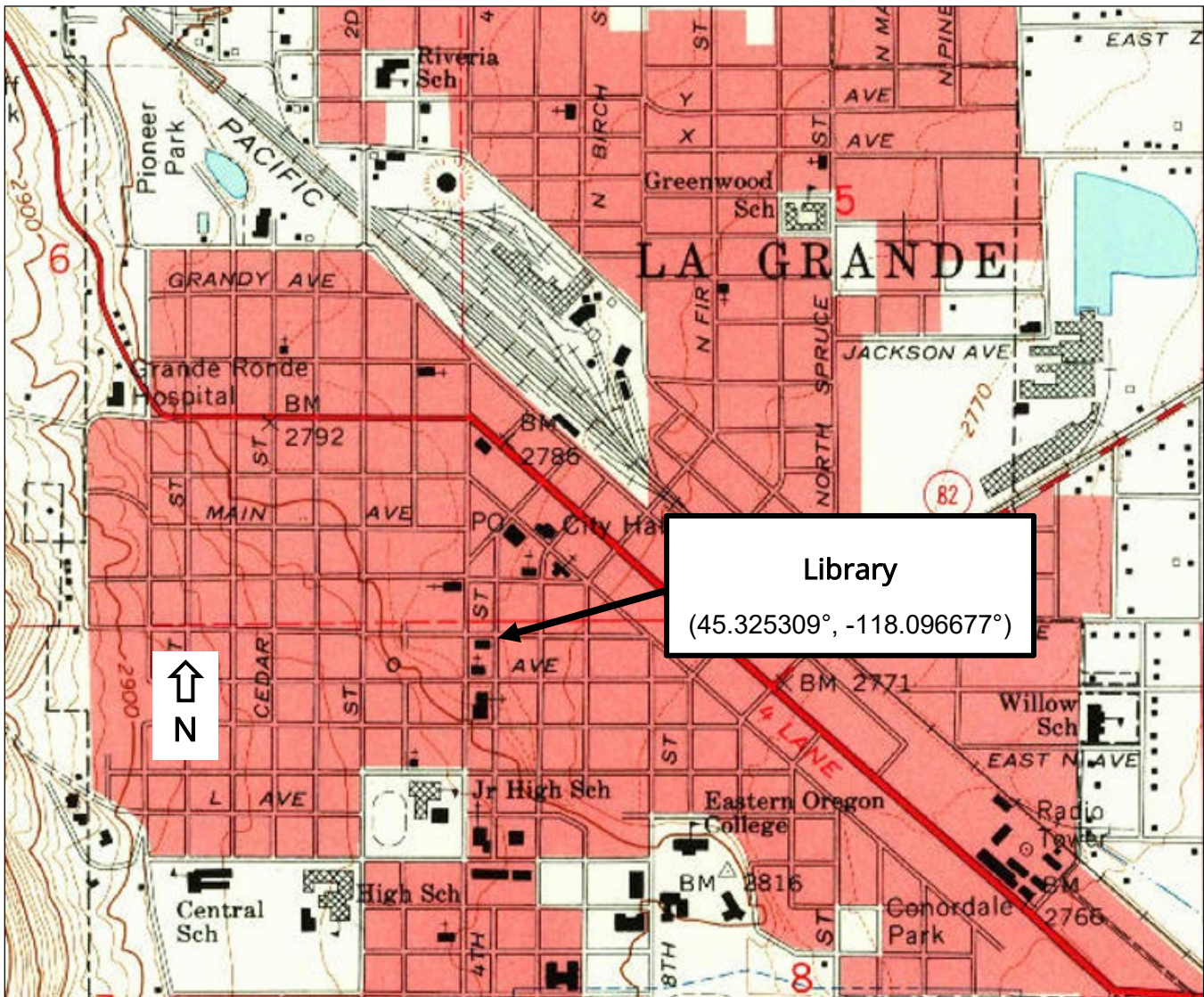
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Figure 1: La Grande, Oregon, USGS Topographic Map La Grande Quadrangle (1963).



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Figure 2: Local Location Map (Google Earth, 2024).



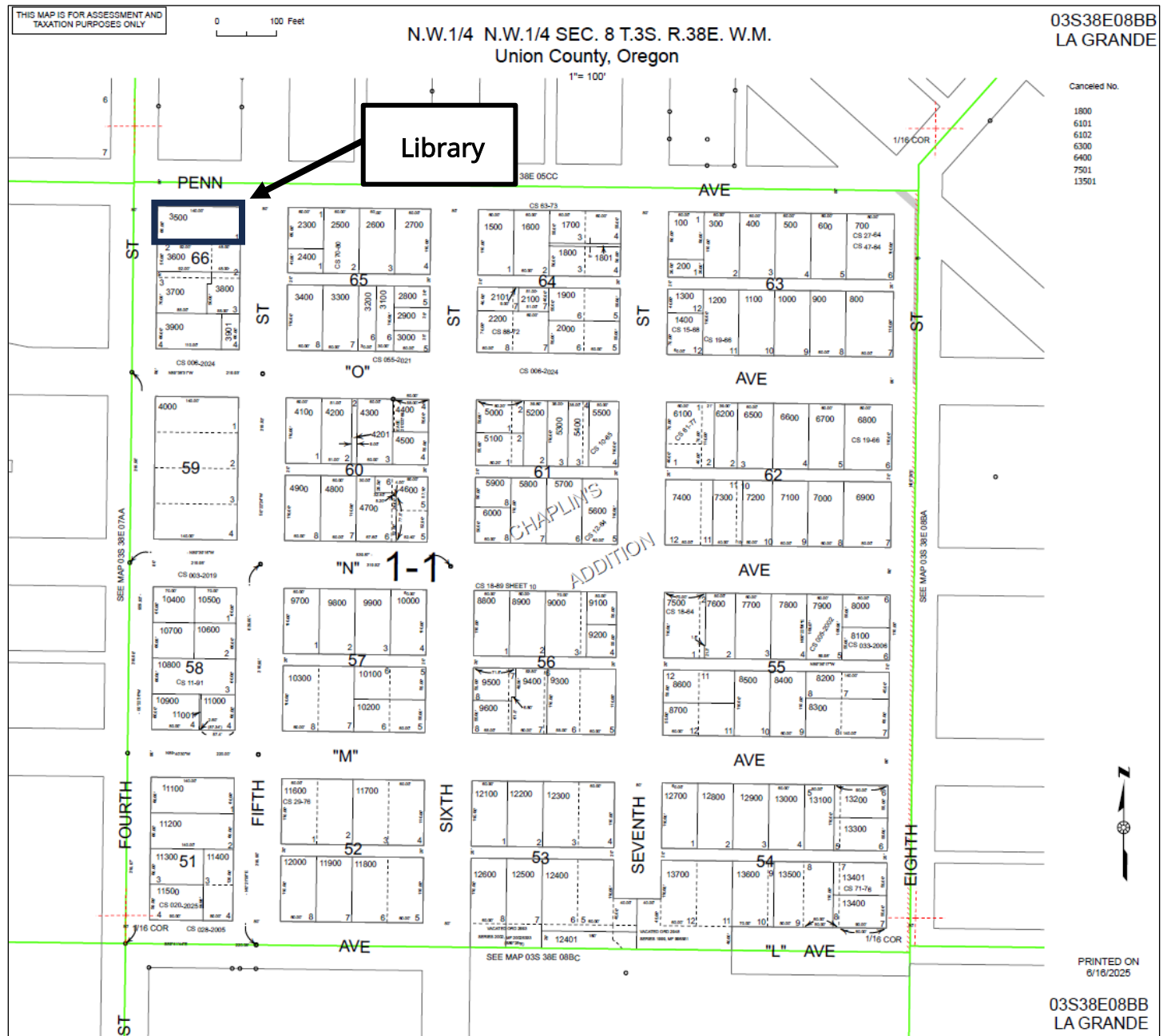
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Figure 3: Tax Lot Map.



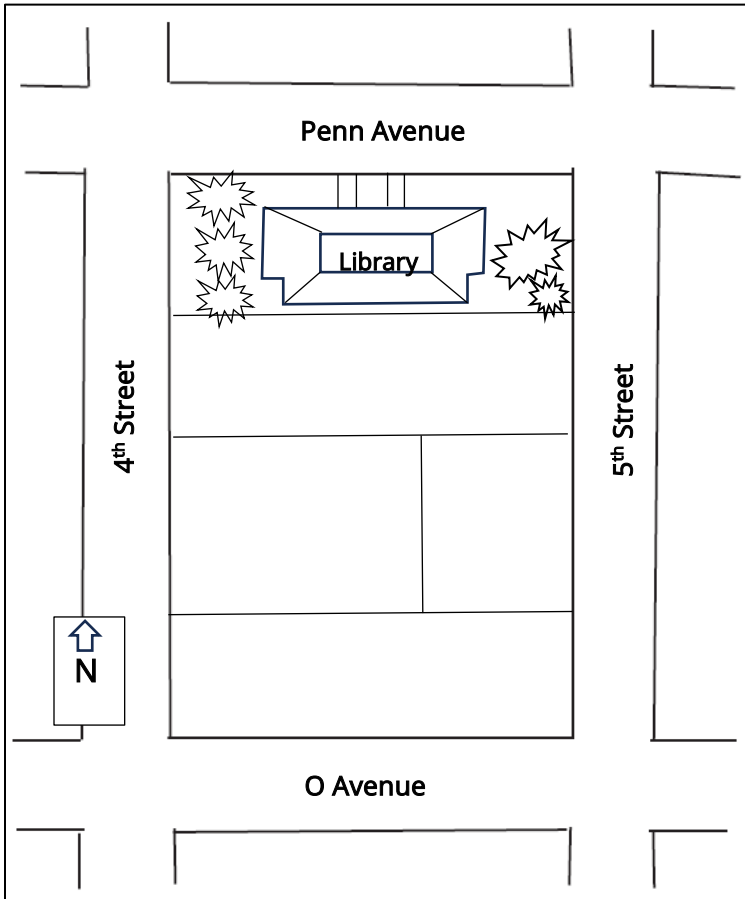
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Figure 4: Site Plan (*not to scale*).



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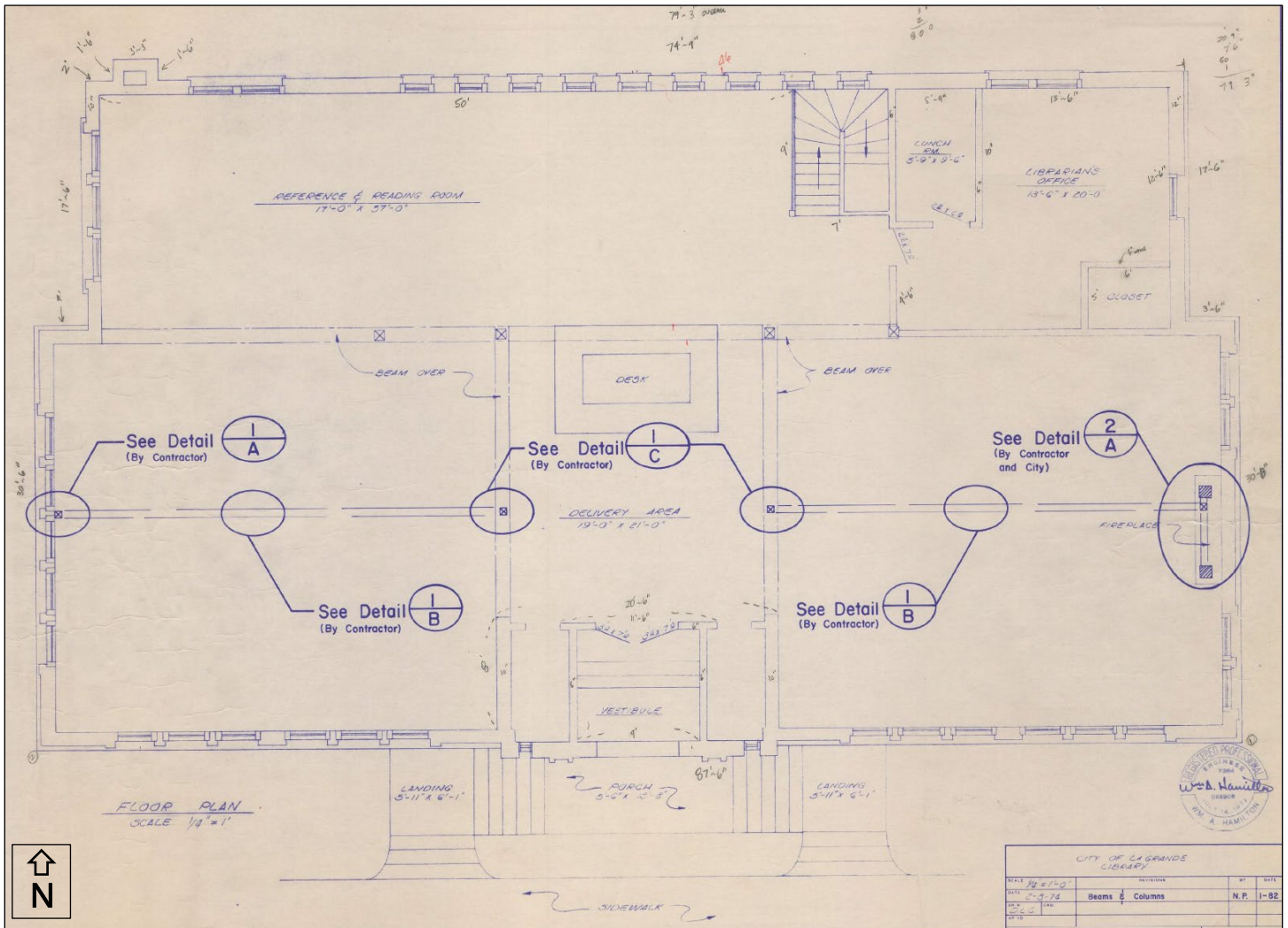
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Figure 5: Main Level Historic Floor Plan, City of La Grande, 1974.

Since these floorplans were created, the circulation desk area has been altered, and the inner vestibule doors and lunchroom walls have been removed.



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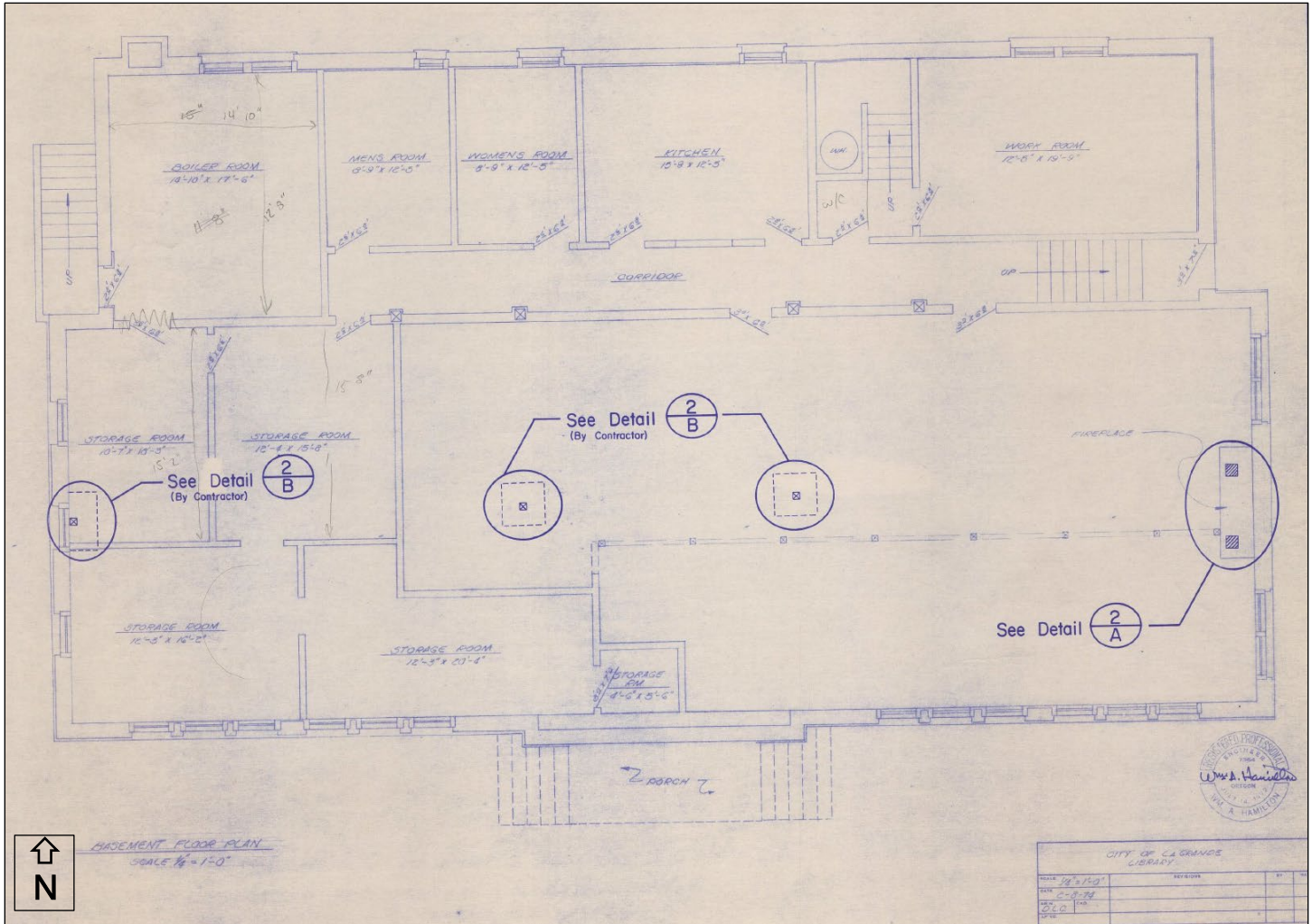
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Figure 6: Basement Level Historic Floor Plan, City of La Grande, 1974.

No alterations to the basement have been documented since these floorplans were created.



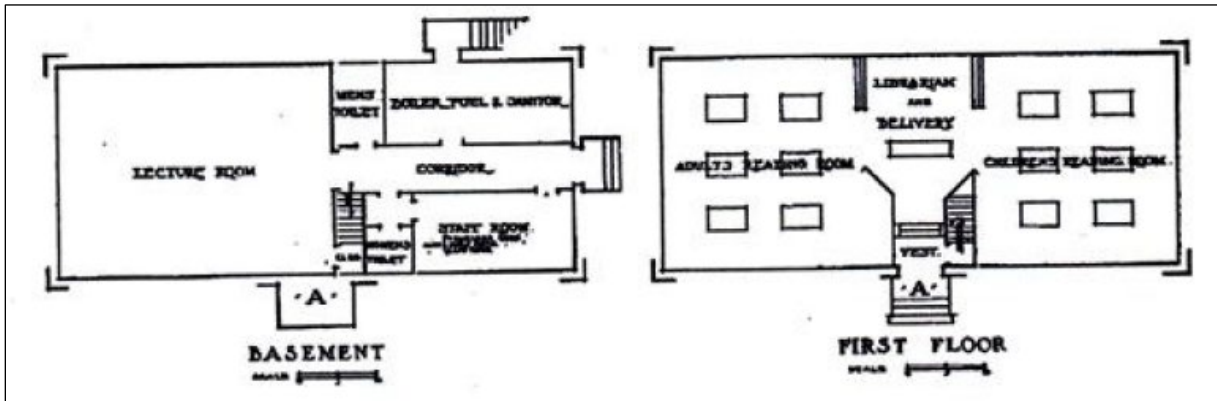
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Figure 7: "Plan A" suggested library floor plan, 1911 (Carnegie Corporation).



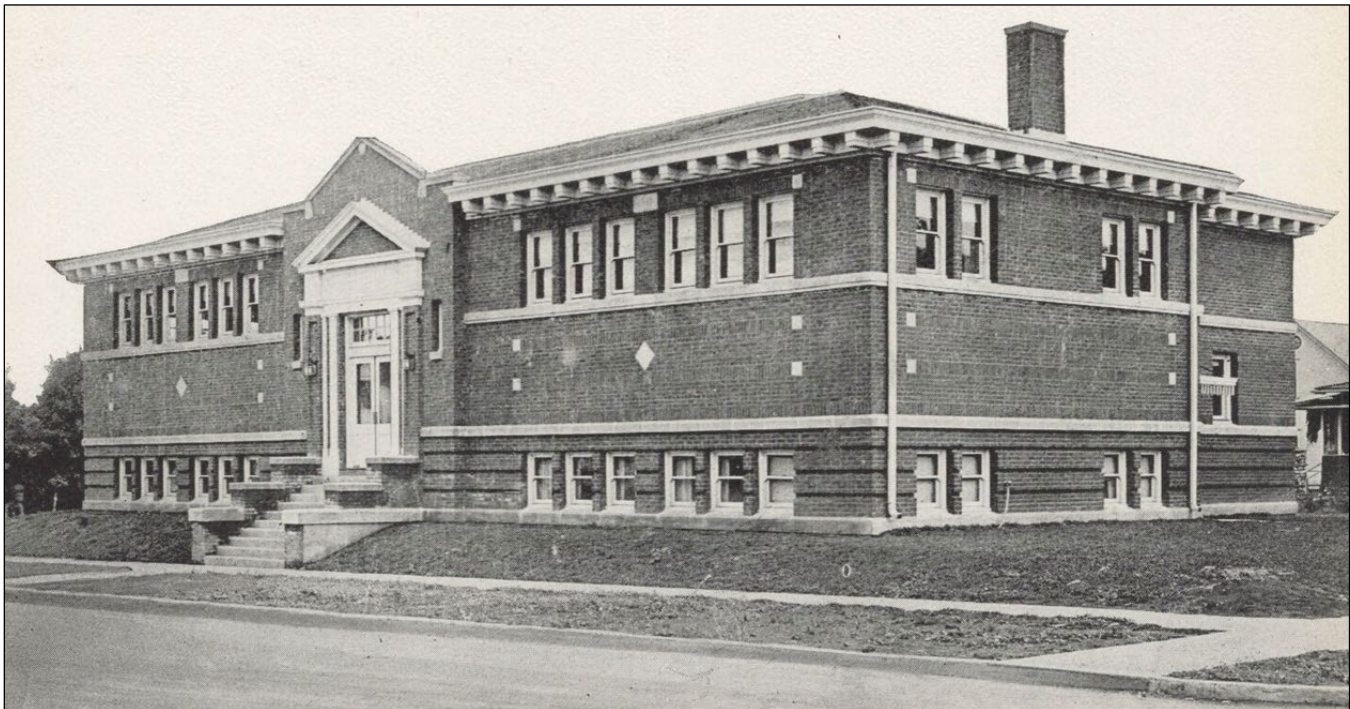
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Figure 8: La Grande Carnegie Library exterior, c1914 (La Grande Public Library Collection).



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Figure 9: La Grande Carnegie Library exterior, c1940 (La Grande Public Library Collection).



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Figure 10: La Grande Carnegie Library exterior, c1970 (La Grande Public Library Collection).



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Figure 11: La Grande Carnegie Library interior, 1920s (*La Grande Observer*, 2006).



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Figure 12: Library interior showing replacement circulation desk, c1960 (La Grande Public Library Collection).



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Figure 13: Library interior showing west reading room and fireplace, c1960 (La Grande Public Library Collection).



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Figure 14: La Grande Carnegie Library interior showing basement children’s room, 1970s (La Grande Public Library Collection).



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Photograph 1 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0001
View of north (main) façade, looking south, September 4, 2025.



Photograph 2 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0002
View of north façade entrance detail, looking south, September 4, 2025.

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Photograph 3 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0003
View of west façade, looking east, September 4, 2025.

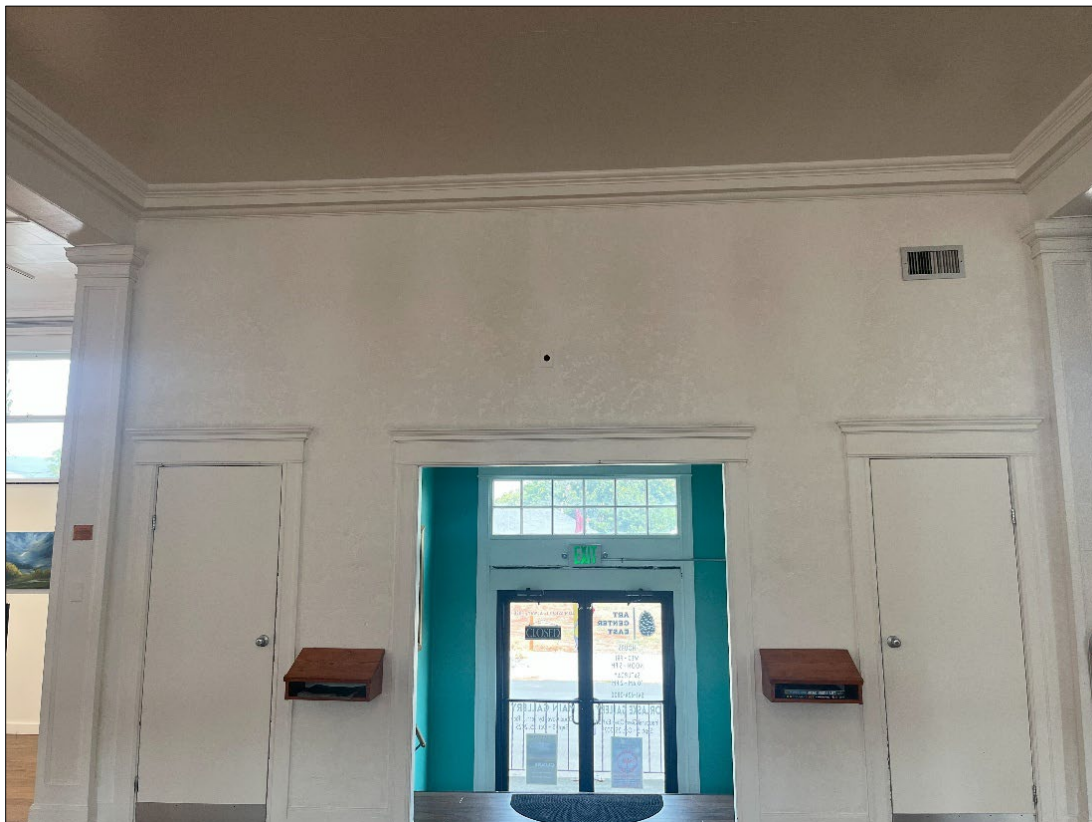


Photograph 4 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0004
View of east and north façades, looking southwest, September 4, 2025.

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Photograph 5 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0005
View of south façade, looking northeast, September 4, 2025.



Photograph 6 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0006
View of interior vestibule and main entrance, looking north, September 5, 2025.

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Photograph 7 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0007
View of interior main level, looking west, September 5, 2025.



Photograph 8 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0008
View of interior main level with gift shop, looking south, September 5, 2025.



Photograph 9 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0009
View of former librarian's office at main level, looking northwest, September 5, 2025.



Photograph 10 of 10: OR_UnionCounty_LaGrandeCarnegieLibrary_0010
View of former children's room at basement level, looking northwest, September 5, 2025.