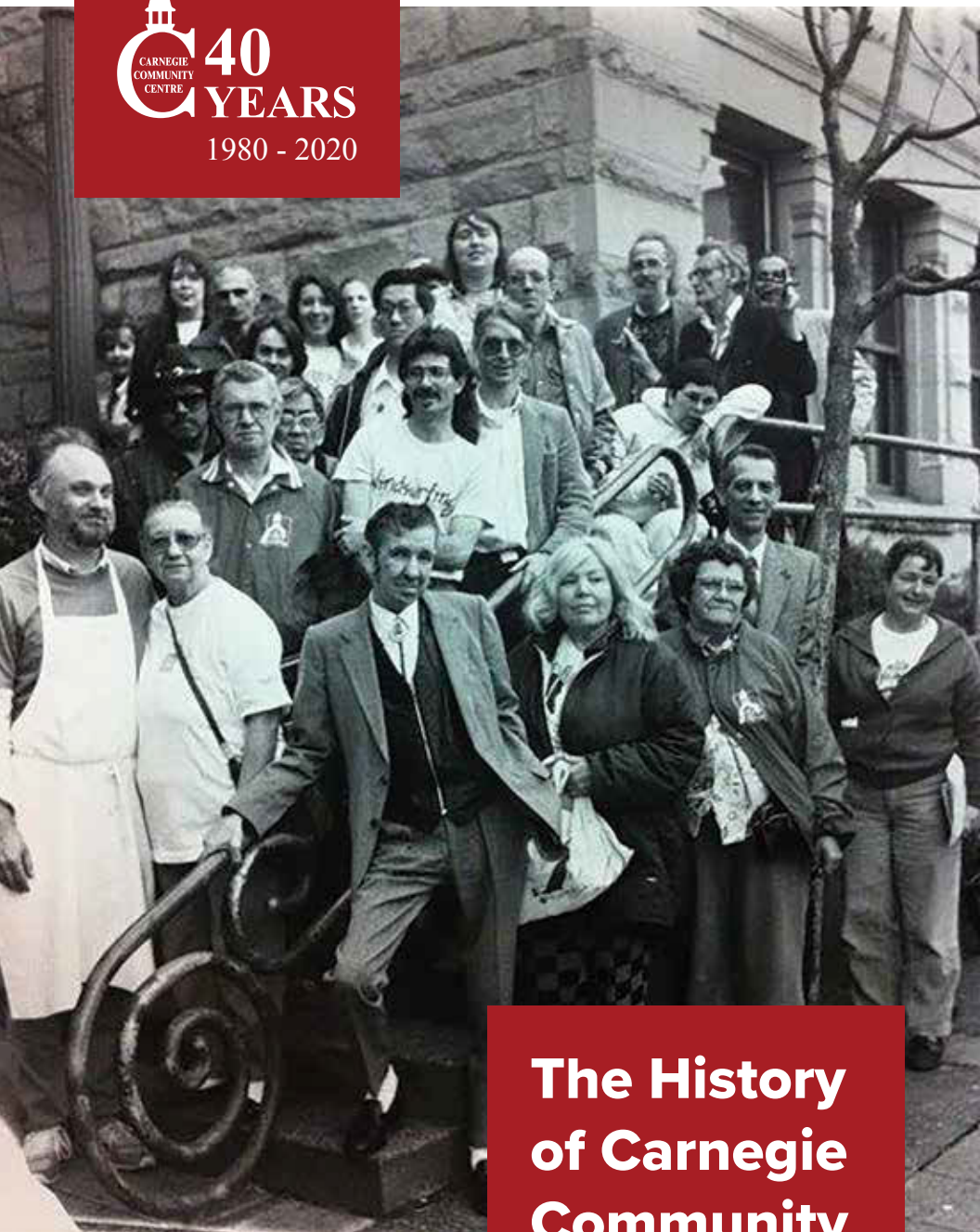




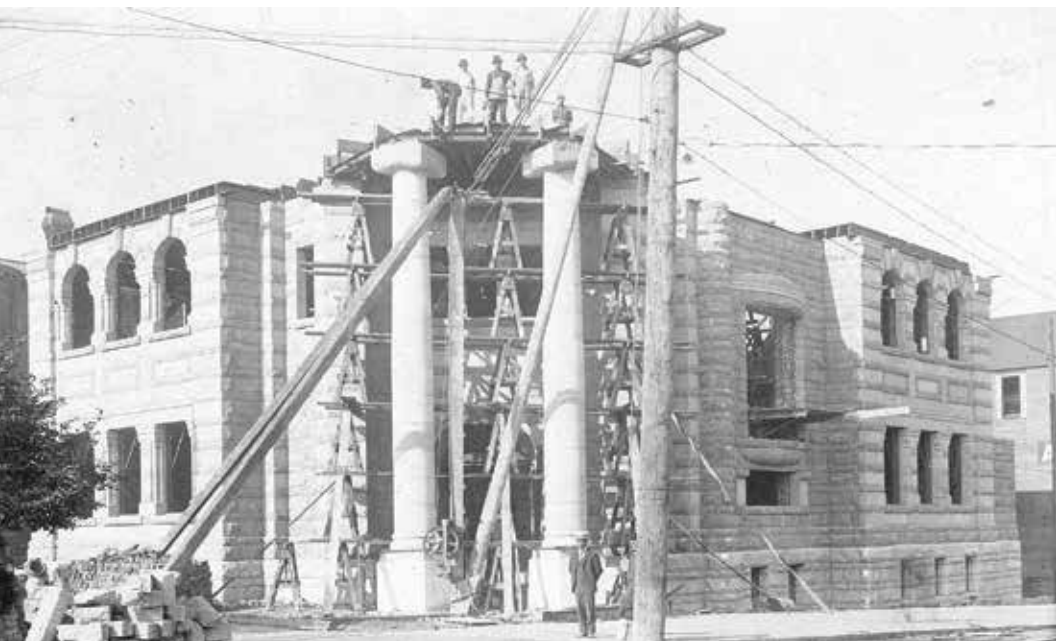
**40**  
**YEARS**

1980 - 2020



# The History of Carnegie Community Centre

# From Time Immemorial



The Carnegie Centre sits on the stolen territory of the  $x^w m\theta k^w \acute{a}y\acute{a}m$  (Musqueam),  $s\acute{a}lilw\acute{e}t\acute{a}l$  (Tsleil-Wauthuth) and  $S\acute{k}w\acute{x}w\acute{u}7mesh$  (Squamish) Nations, who have continually inhabited and cared for this area for over 10,000 years. Roughly 170 years ago European colonisation and settlement began in what we now refer to as the Downtown Eastside (DTES). Initially, Indigenous peoples traded furs for manufactured goods. Europeans carried diseases with them that reduced the Indigenous population.

During the Cariboo gold rush, thousands of settlers arrived seeking land and natural resources which resulted in land usage rights being replaced by a land ownership system which excluded Indigenous ownership of their traditional ancestral territories. During the second half of the 19th century, Chinese immigrants began to arrive, mainly via California, due to the Gold Rush and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. At around the same time, Japanese immigrants were settling on Paueru Gai (Powell Street Grounds), in the area around nearby Oppenheimer Park.

In 1900, library service was provided by the YMCA, in a small room at the Hotel Astor with poor lighting and heating. Patrons of this library petitioned city hall for a more suitable and well-supplied library. In 1901, Alfred Allayne-Jones, a Vancouver lawyer, wrote to Ottawa to inquire about a \$200,000 donation that was received by the nearby city of Seattle for the construction of a public library. The donor was the Scottish-American industrialist Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie agreed to donate \$50,000 for the construction of a public library in Vancouver under the condition that the City of Vancouver would invest \$5,000 per year for the maintenance of the library. On March 19, 1901, the City's library board held a meeting during which they approved the gift and conditions.

**On March 19, 1901, the City's library board held a meeting during which they approved the gift of \$50,000 from Andrew Carnegie under the condition that the city would invest \$5,000 per year for the maintenance of the library.**

# The Carnegie Public Library



Vancouver's Carnegie Library was one of 125 public libraries funded across Canada by Andrew Carnegie between 1903 and 1925. There was some contention over where Vancouver's library would be built but, after a public vote, it was decided that it would be built on the corner of Hastings and Westminster (now Main) Streets. Recommended building plans were provided by Carnegie's assistant James Bertram, which gave all Carnegie libraries a particular signature – large columns, wide steps to the front door, and a stonework exterior. A winding marble staircase reaches three floors and becomes a landing to encounter large scale painted stained glass windows featuring the players of the literary canon.



In September of 1902, construction began with the laying of the building's cornerstone. Placed under the cornerstone were documents from the Grand Lodge of the Masonic Order, a copy of the City of Vancouver's Act of Incorporation, and a variety of coins and postage stamps that were used during the time.

**On November 11, 1903, the Lending Library Room was opened to the public and by the end of 1903, the library's collection had approximately 8,100 items.**

Construction problems prevented the library from opening all of its rooms at once, so the library was opened "room-by-room" into early 1904. At first, the library shared the building with the Vancouver Art, Historical and Scientific Society who occupied the third floor. The relationship between the two





organisations was not without strife, mostly due to City Council failing to pay heating and lighting fees for the Museum. This culminated in 1905 when the Library Board considered cutting power to the third floor.



In 1929, due to a lack of useable space, the library expanded into the vacated City Hall which stood next to the library and turned the expansion into a newspaper reading room. The reading room was mainly used by unemployed and elderly men. As the economic situation worsened for people residing in Vancouver due to the Depression, lay-offs to library staff and a lack of new materials made it difficult to provide services to a population that had grown greatly since the library first opened.

**In 1905, increasing social unrest resulted in what is now referred to as “The Occupation of Carnegie.”**

A group of 250 striking workers stormed the Carnegie on May 18, 1935. Met with support by the citizens of Vancouver, the occupying workers received coffee, tea, sandwiches and cigarettes from the public by lowering ropes from the third floor windows. The workers were eventually convinced to leave by being offered cash relief funds and a promise not to be prosecuted.



In 1957 a new Central library was built on the corner of Burrard and Robson Streets, which ended the Carnegie's tenure as the city's main branch. The Carnegie closed for almost a year and, after renovations, re-

opened as The Vancouver Museum. The Museum contained an eclectic collection of items featuring an Egyptian mummy, 14th Century Japanese Armour, and a 500 item collection of BC birds, which was the largest collection of its kind in the entire world. Due to a lack of funding and a state of disrepair, the Museum closed on November 6, 1968, with its collection put in storage or auctioned off.

FREE

JANUARY 15, 20

# Carnegie

NEWSLETTER



Libby, Bruce and Leif at the Grand Opening





10



of the Carnegie!

The building remained empty until 1980. Between 1968 and 1980, a city-wide debate took place over what to do with the building. In 1972 the Carnegie was threatened with demolition, but it received Historical Building status which prevented it from being torn down. In 1974 the City attempted to sell or lease the building but received no serious bids. Then-Mayor Art Phillips even attempted to give the building away, but this was prevented by City Council.

Eventually, the Downtown Eastside Residents Association (D.E.R.A.), led by Libby Davies, Jean Swanson, and Bruce Eriksen, proposed turning the building into a community centre which included a library. This proposal was ultimately approved in 1978. Funding of \$1.2 million was granted, and after substantial repairs and renovations, including the removal of thousands of pigeons who had roosted under the dome, the current iteration of the Carnegie was opened to the public.

# The Carnegie Community Centre



Since the Carnegie Community Centre (“the Centre”) reopened on January 20, 1980, it has provided a safe and welcoming space for anyone who walks through its doors. The Centre is known as the “Living Room of the Downtown Eastside,” and is a place of respite, connection, and safety in the community 365 days per year. The food service, which started with sandwiches and a crockpot, has grown into a full-service cafeteria variety of nutritious, and inexpensive, meals prepared daily, primarily from scratch and using local food inputs. The Centre also operates community recreation programs at nearby Oppenheimer Park, the “Backyard of the Downtown Eastside.”

**Centre membership costs \$1 annually. Membership includes access to art workshops, writing groups, music jam sessions, film screenings, poetry nights, a weight room, and more.**

The contributions of many artists are featured in the annual Downtown Eastside Heart of the City festival, a collaboration between the Carnegie Community Centre, Vancouver Moving Theatre, and the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians, founded in 2004.



Programs and services at Carnegie Community Centre are delivered in partnership between the City of Vancouver and the Carnegie Community Centre Association (CCCA), a charitable organisation led by a volunteer board of directors made up of Downtown Eastside community members, who provide voice for the community and leadership and advice to staff in determining the direction of programs and activities. The CCCA has been publishing the Carnegie Newsletter twice a month since

August 1986. The newsletter features content related to poverty, housing, community activism regarding drugs, women, Indigenous matters, politics, festivals and more. It is widely read and always free.





The Carnegie Community Centre is also a home for community partners. The Vancouver Public Library's Carnegie Branch welcomes patrons to browse the collection, use computers, and be wooed by the hardworking and compassionate staff. The Bud Osborn Collection

and DTES Collection are both so special they are not located on the usual shelves; however, if you ask library staff they will assist you in accessing them. The Chinese Collection is also important to note as it is carefully selected by a Chinese language Library Technician.

Capilano University runs the Learning Centre where instructors and volunteers work with students at their own pace to upgrade (from math to writing), to hone digital skills, to make curious things, and more.



**Through the support of many partners, funders, and individuals, the Centre and Oppenheimer Park are able to offer a large variety of low-barrier education, social, recreational, and cultural programs and events.**



“Women’s Memorial March - Vancouver” by jencastrotakespictures is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0

The Centre also serves as a community space for many local organisations and groups, providing space for meetings, large scale events, and town halls. The annual February 14th Women’s Memorial March has commenced at the Carnegie every year since 1992. The March signifies a continued collective response to Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit peoples.

Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU) is another local user-based peer support group. VANDU was established in 1998 through the unwavering determination of Ann



Livingston and Bud Osborn. VANDU went on to lobby for the creation of Insite, North America’s first safe injection site, and held some of their early meetings at the Carnegie.





## **Volunteers are the backbone of the Centre and Oppenheimer Park activities, services and operations.**

An average of 200 active volunteers work in a variety of areas every day, including food service and preparation, tutoring, recreation, and event support. Many of the volunteers are from the neighbourhood, helping to strengthen community and reduce isolation. Programs for Volunteers include holiday activations, trips, awards, and more.





# In Times of Change and Crisis

The Centre is open 365 days a year, and acts as a key community resource and service hub in challenging times. The Centre has operated as an essential service during labour disruptions, expanded services to include life-saving supports for community members during the opioid crisis, and continued to provide thousands of meals, a warm, safe space, and access critical resources like daily news and free public WiFi during COVID-19. In times of need, the Centre doesn't stop.



 **40**  
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# Contact

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**VANCOUVER  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY**