

# LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



## **Blackstone Library**

**4904 South Lake Park Avenue**

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**Final Landmark Recommendation adopted by the Commission on  
Chicago Landmarks, August 5, 2010**



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# **BLACKSTONE LIBRARY**

**4904 South Lake Park Avenue**

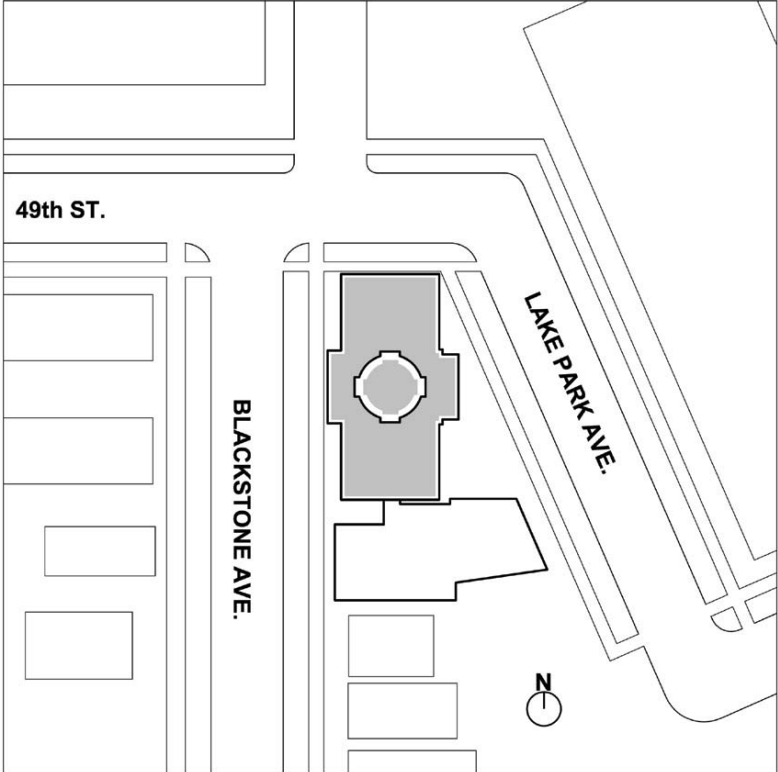
**Date: 1904**

**Architect: Solon S. Beman**

Built in 1904, the Blackstone Library is a stately Classical Revival-style building designed by Chicago architect Solon S. Beman, the noted designer of the industrial town of Pullman. It was presented as a gift to the city by Isabel Norton Blackstone in honor of her late husband, Timothy Beach Blackstone, a Chicago railroad executive and philanthropist. As the first purpose-built library branch in the city, the Blackstone represents the Chicago Public Library's early efforts to serve the needs of readers in rapidly growing neighborhoods. Despite its relatively compact size, the Blackstone Library's carved granite entrance portico and richly decorated rotunda provide a grand setting for one of America's greatest institutions: the free public library.



The Blackstone Library is located at 4904 S. Lake Park Avenue in the Kenwood community area. The location was originally chosen for its proximity to several public schools, and the library continues to serve a large student population from surrounding schools.



## TIMOTHY BEACH BLACKSTONE AND ISABEL NORTON BLACKSTONE

The Blackstone Library was built as a memorial to Chicago railroad executive Timothy Beach Blackstone by his widow, Isabel Farnsworth Norton Blackstone. Timothy Blackstone was born on a farm in Branford, Connecticut, in 1829 into a family which traced its roots back to early colonial settlers in New England. Rather than pursuing higher education, he left school at age 18 to work on a railroad surveying team for the New York and New Haven Railroad.

At the age of twenty-two, Blackstone came to Illinois to supervise construction of a section of the Illinois Central Railroad. Though his knowledge of civil engineering was acquired through self-study, he excelled at the work and soon rose in 1856 to the position of chief construction engineer on a section of the Joliet and Chicago Railroad. He resided in LaSalle, Illinois, at this time and also served as that town's mayor for one term.

In 1861 Blackstone became the president of the Joliet and Chicago Railroad. When this railroad merged with the Chicago and Alton Railroad, Blackstone was promoted to president of the larger company, where he would remain for twenty-five years. Under his leadership the Chicago and Alton expanded and grew to be one of the most profitable railroads in the Midwest, and it was known as an early innovator of sleeping and dining cars. In addition to his executive position with the railroad, Blackstone was one of the incorporators and first president of the Chicago Union Stockyards.

Like many Northeasterners who prospered in rapidly-growing Chicago, Blackstone remembered his family's historic connections to Branford, Connecticut. In 1890 a group of Branford residents began a fundraising campaign to establish a public library in the town. Upon learning of this effort, Blackstone committed to completely fund the construction of the new library and to furnish it with books and an endowment. Indeed, it seems Blackstone had an interest in literature and libraries, for he also served for many years on the Board of Directors of the Crerar Library in Chicago, a privately-endowed library with a focus on science and technology.

Blackstone dedicated the library in Branford to his late father James. Completed in 1896, the James Blackstone Library in Branford is in the Classical Revival style with Ionic Order details. It was designed by architect Solon S. Beman and included mural decorations by Oliver Dennett Grover. Clearly in its function as a memorial and as a library, as well as in its architecture, the library in Branford presaged the Blackstone Library in Chicago.

Timothy Blackstone died of pneumonia in 1900 at the age of 71 at his home on S. Michigan Avenue. The home was at the present-day location of the Blackstone Hotel, and the hotel's name memorializes Blackstone. In his obituaries, Blackstone was remembered as a successful executive and for his generous philanthropy. Beneficiaries of his estate included several arts and social service organizations in Chicago including the Art Institute of Chicago and the Chicago Orphan Asylum. However, the vast majority of the wealth he had acquired as a railroad executive was left to his widow, Isabel Farnsworth Norton Blackstone. There is no indication

that Timothy Blackstone ordered or willed the construction of the Chicago library that bears his name, rather the motivation for it appears to have been exclusively his widow's. Of course the library in Branford offered Isabel Norton Blackstone guidance on how best to memorialize her late husband.

She proposed the donation to the Board of Directors of the Chicago Library in 1901. Construction began ceremoniously on June 23, 1902, when Isabel Norton Blackstone laid the cornerstone using the same trowel her late husband used for the cornerstone of the library in Branford, Connecticut. Eighteen months later the library was formally dedicated on January 8, 1904. Before handing over the keys to library board president John Eckhart, Isabel Norton Blackstone made a brief address stating "I trust that none in the community will feel that they are unwelcome here. May this key unlock the treasures of literature to many a mute, inglorious Milton," the latter being a literary reference to Thomas Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* from 1751. In gratitude, the library board presented Mrs. Blackstone with a book of thanks signed by adults and children who resided in the neighborhood which promised "in its architectural beauty this memorial is a gem of purest ray serene. May we wear it worthily. May we use it as not abusing it, and may we ever be grateful to the generous giver."

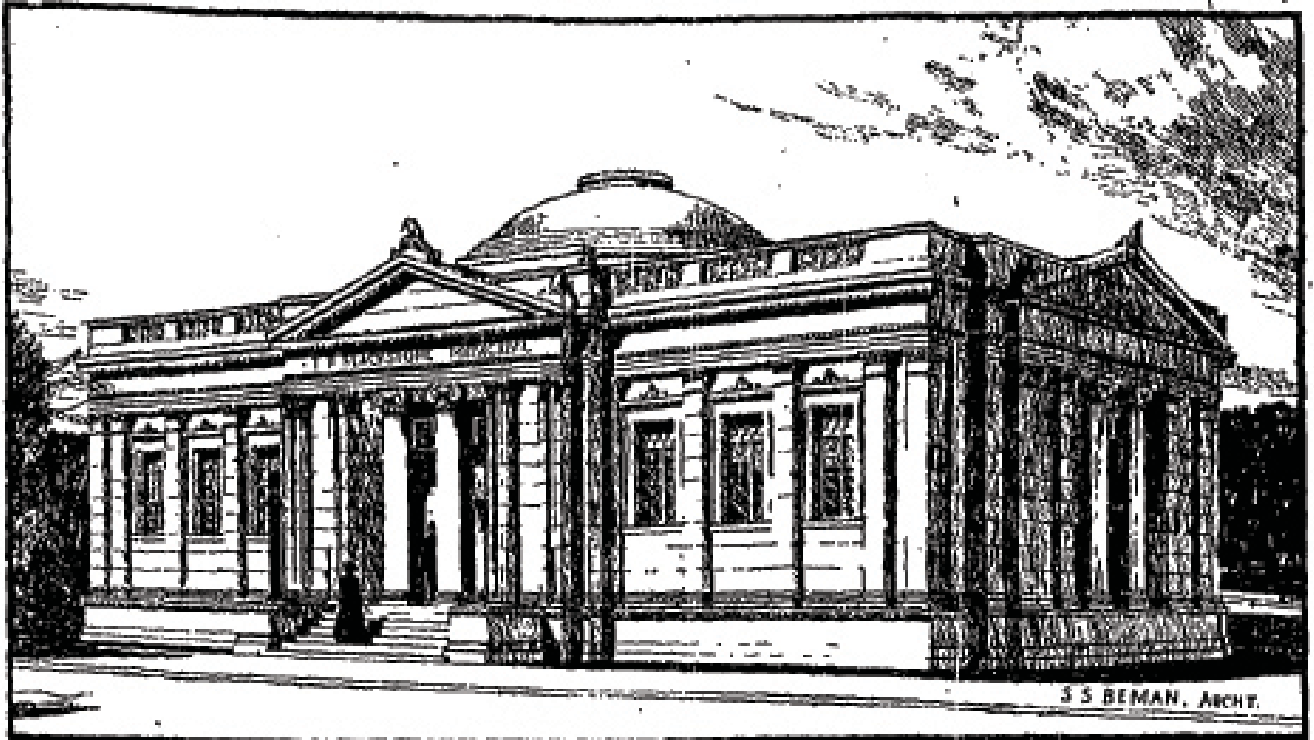
As donor of the library, Isabel Norton Blackstone exemplifies two broader themes in American history in the late nineteenth century. First, her financial gift reflects the important role that women, both as individuals and in the form of library clubs, played in the formation of America's public library system through the donation of money and volunteer labor. Historians estimate that women were responsible for the establishment of 75 per cent of free public libraries. As library builders, the contributions of women have been overshadowed by their male counterparts such as Andrew Carnegie, and in Chicago by John Crerar and Walter Loomis Newberry.

Second, Mrs. Blackstone's establishment of the Blackstone Library reflects the intentions of the Progressive movement which sought to improve the quality of life in increasingly crowded and industrialized cities by improving public access to education and culture. The Progressive understanding of the importance of a free public library was best expressed by then-Chicago Public Library director Henry Legler, who stated "There is no government enterprise – not excepting the public schools – that so epitomizes the spirit of democracy."

By entrusting the library to a government agency, Mrs. Blackstone manifested the Progressive ideal that private individuals of means should collaborate with public government to improve services. Furthermore, the use of Classical Revival-style architecture for the library fits into the context of the City Beautiful movement. Closely aligned with the goals of Progressivism, the City Beautiful promoted the use of Classical architecture for public buildings to enrich the quality of civic life.



**CORNER STONE OF TIMOTHY B. BLACKSTONE MEMORIAL LIBRARY LAID**



3 S BEMAN, ARCHT.

The illustration shows the site of the new library building, which will be situated on the corner of the intersection of this roadway on



The Blackstone Library was presented as a gift to the city by Isabel Norton Blackstone [1838-1928] (bottom left) in honor of her late husband, Timothy Beach Blackstone [1829-1900] (bottom right), a Chicago railroad executive and philanthropist. On June 24, 1902, the *Chicago Tribune* published the architect's rendering of the building (top) on the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone.

## THE BLACKSTONE LIBRARY AS THE FIRST PURPOSE-BUILT BRANCH OF THE CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY

As the first purpose-built branch of the Chicago Public Library, the Blackstone Library represents an important step in the evolution of the city's library system. Prior to the Great Fire, there were several libraries in the city, yet none of these were free and open to the public. While the Fire destroyed all of these institutions in 1871, it also led directly to the establishment of the Chicago Public Library when two months after the Fire Londoner A.H. Burgess promoted a charitable plan in England to donate a library to the city of Chicago as a "token of true brotherly kindness." In addition to British writers, booksellers, and publishers, Queen Victoria contributed to the "English Book Donation" that formed the foundation of the Chicago Public Library's collection.

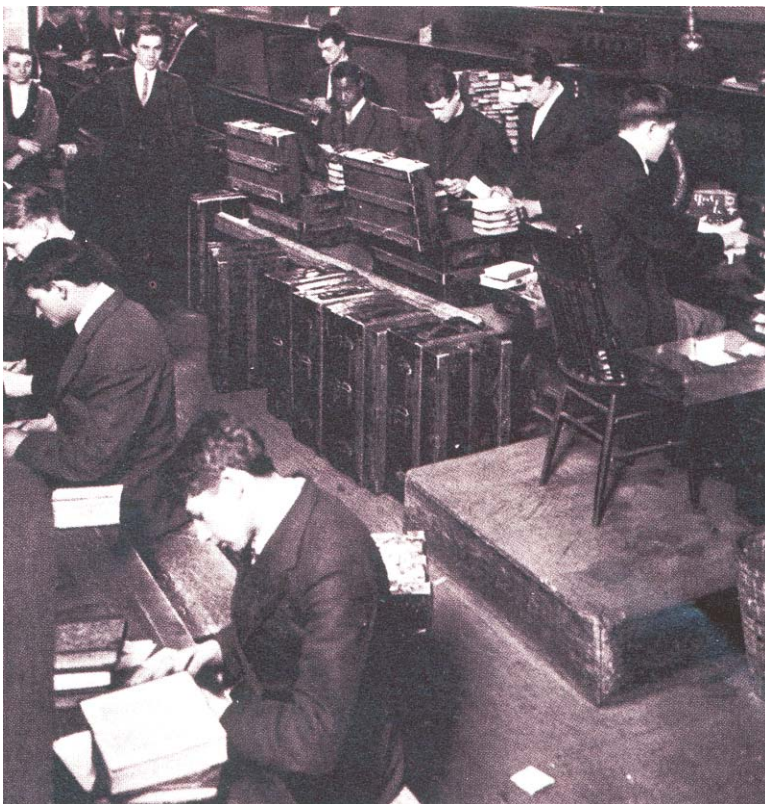
In 1873 the Chicago Public Library began its operation with 3,157 volumes in an old steel water tank that had survived the Fire at LaSalle and Adams Streets. Over the next two decades, the library occupied various rented locations until it opened its first permanent home in 1897 on Michigan Avenue between Washington and Randolph Streets (now the Chicago Cultural Center, a designated Chicago Landmark).

The rapid geographic and population expansion of the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries prompted the Chicago Public Library to extend its services to neighborhood readers who lived far from the central library downtown. As early as 1874, a delivery station system was established at neighborhood stores where books could be ordered by patrons and delivered to the store by the library. As the demand for the service grew, store owners were paid a small fee for their participation in the program. The library also established deposit stations with off-site collection of books in neighborhood churches, businesses and factories that members or employees could checkout.

The next step in the evolution of neighborhood services was the establishment of branch reading rooms in the 1890s. These were rented spaces in park field houses or on the upper floors of commercial buildings. The reading rooms were staffed by Chicago Public Library employees and contained collections of books which circulated to patrons. One such reading room existed at 53<sup>rd</sup> and Lake Park Ave., and the construction in 1904 of the Blackstone Library nearby led to some concern in the neighborhood about the closure of the reading room.

Designed and built as a library, the Blackstone was the first true neighborhood branch of the Chicago Public Library. It would take the agency another seven years for the library board to build a second branch (the Hiram Kelly Branch, built 1911, at 6151 S. Normal Blvd.). In the intervening years, the Tribune observed that "the city of Chicago has long since outgrown the idea of a central or single library." Substantial expansion of library branches in Chicago occurred in the 1920s under the leadership of Henry E. Legler, whose *Library Plan for the Whole City* called for "library service within the walking distance of home for every person in Chicago."





Before the development of Chicago Public Library's branch system, a system of delivery stations was employed to serve readers in the city's ever-expanding neighborhoods. Above, new horse-drawn delivery wagons for the library's delivery system. At left, books are being boxed for delivery by staff at the central library (now the Chicago Cultural Center).





**At top, the view of the primary front elevation of the building facing east. At bottom, the rear (west) elevation with its engaged portico; note also the use of similar pedimented porticos on the side elevations.**

## BUILDING DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

The Blackstone Library occupies a triangular lot bounded by 49<sup>th</sup> Street, Lake Park Avenue, and Blackstone Avenue (the street name was changed to Blackstone after the construction of the library). The location was consciously chosen by Mrs. Blackstone due to its proximity to several public schools, and the library continues to serve a large student population from surrounding schools in the Kenwood community area.

The light-gray, Concord-granite building is rectangular in plan with the primary elevation facing east on a spur of E. 49<sup>th</sup> Street leading to South Lake Park Avenue. Beman's design employs classical form and stylistic details that make the building appear much larger and more monumental than its modest dimensions of 110 by 60 feet. The placement of the building on a raised plinth and its lofty interior ceiling heights also make the building appear taller than its one-story height.

The architectural style of the building closely follows the Ionic Order of Greek Classical architecture, though it also includes a low dome drawn from Roman classicism. The massing of the front facade is symmetrical with two wings flanking a prominent entrance portico. Each wing is divided into three bays with engaged pilasters and large window openings. The library's bronze entrance doors at the center of the portico are reached by a broad flight of stairs from the sidewalk. An exedra, or bench of carved granite, curves out from the front facade to the sidewalk providing an inviting place to sit at the front of the building.

Most descriptions of the Blackstone Library state that it was influenced by the Erechtheion, a hexastyle prostyle temple at the Acropolis in Athens from the fifth century, BC, which is regarded as a primary source for the Ionic Order. The similarity is perhaps most visible in the library's projecting temple-front porch with six columns, a prominent feature of the Erechtheion. The massive columns display the Ionic Order's characteristic features with prominent volutes at the capitals, fluted shafts and molded bases. Palmettes, egg-and-dart molding and anthemion are other Ionic motifs found at the Blackstone. The words "T. B. Blackstone Memorial" are engraved in the tall entablature above the columns. The portico is capped with prominent acroteria at the apex and lower corners of the pedimented gable. A granite balustrade carved with a geometric pattern tops the wings of the building.

The west or rear elevation closely follows the front facade, with two wings flanking a pedimented portico, though here the portico is shallow and the columns are engaged with the facade. Similarly, the narrow north elevation is a temple frame also with an engaged portico and pediment. Window openings on these elevations are large and framed with stone molding. The south elevation is identical to the north, though a portion of it is obscured by a 1939 addition.

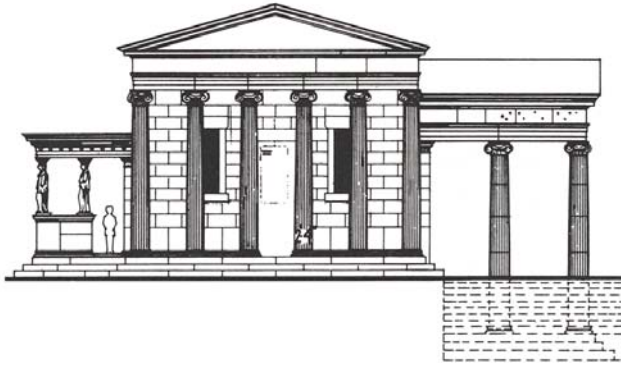
In addition to the influence of Classical architecture from antiquity, the design of the Blackstone Library also exhibits the influence of Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508-80). Palladio's villa designs, which he published in his *Quattro Libri* in 1570 drew from Roman





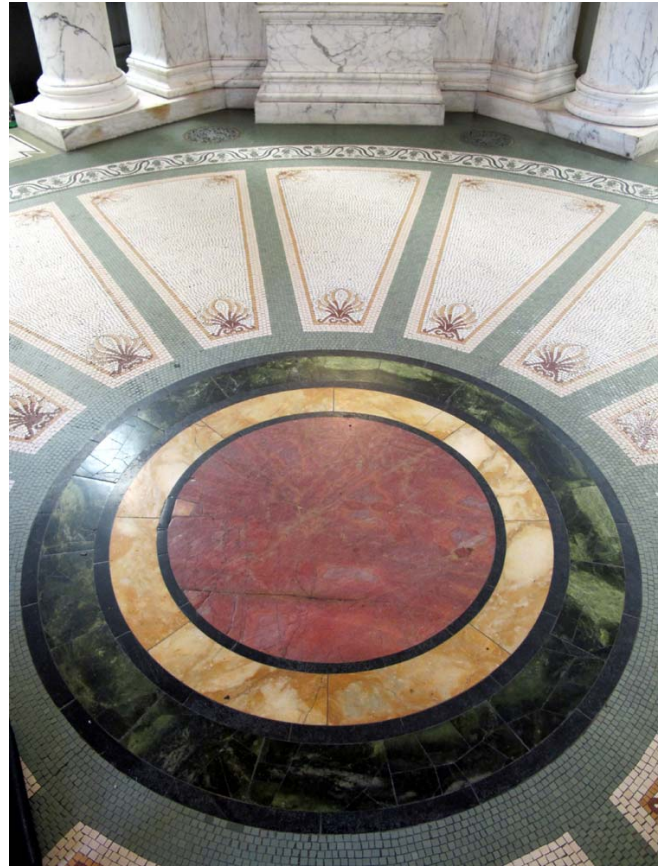
Classical details in carved granite abound at the Blackstone Library, including the Ionic Order column capitals (top left) and bases (top right), as well as the acroterion ornament at the peak and corners of the pediment and the anthemion decoration crowning the dome (above). The library's prostyle portico (at right), or projecting temple-front porch with six columns, is derived from the fifth century, BC, Erechtheion temple at the Acropolis in Athens (top of facing page).



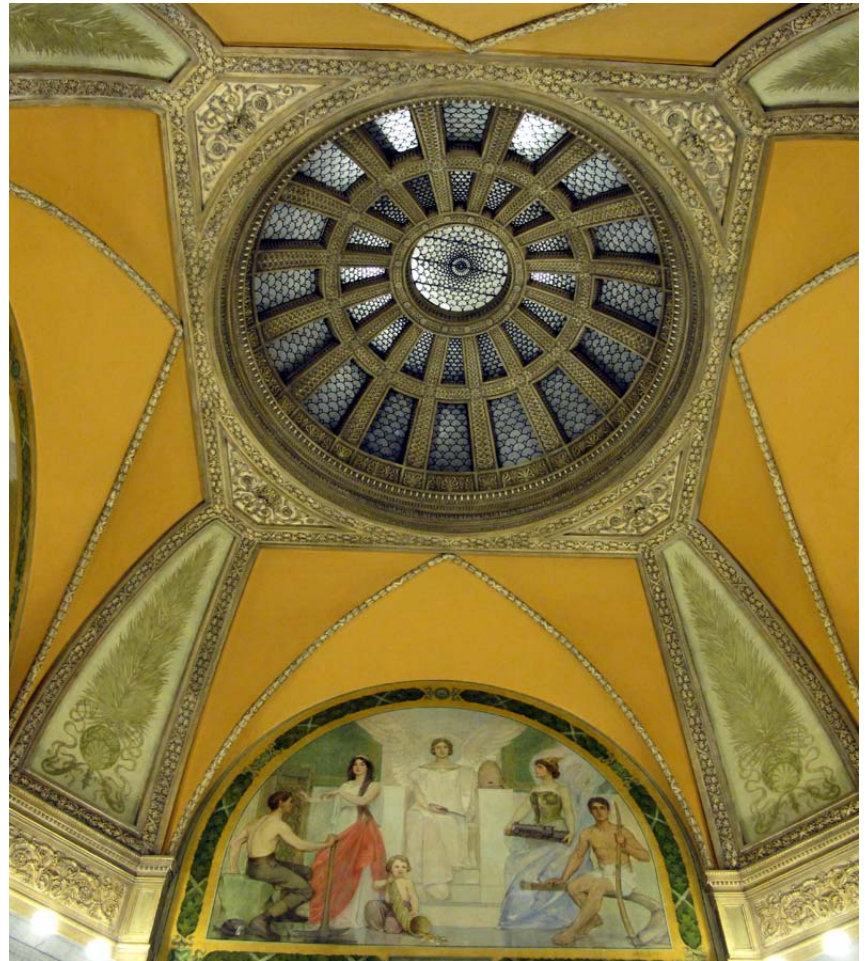


Architect Solon S. Beman's design for the Blackstone Library draws from Classical and Italian Renaissance precedents, including the Erechtheion, a temple at the Acropolis in Athens from the fifth century, BC, which is regarded as a primary source for the Ionic Order (reconstructed view at top left, existing view at top right). A likely influence is also Andrea Palladio's influential application of Classical forms to a range of building types during the Italian Renaissance, perhaps best exemplified by the Villa Rotunda (second from top), at Vicenza, Italy, circa 1550s. Palladio's designs had an enormous influence on English and American Colonial architecture in the eighteenth century, such as Thomas Jefferson's Monticello (second from bottom, 1794-1809). Classicism in architecture was the dominant theme at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, and Beman's Merchant Tailors Building (bottom) at the fair is a direct predecessor to the Blackstone Library.

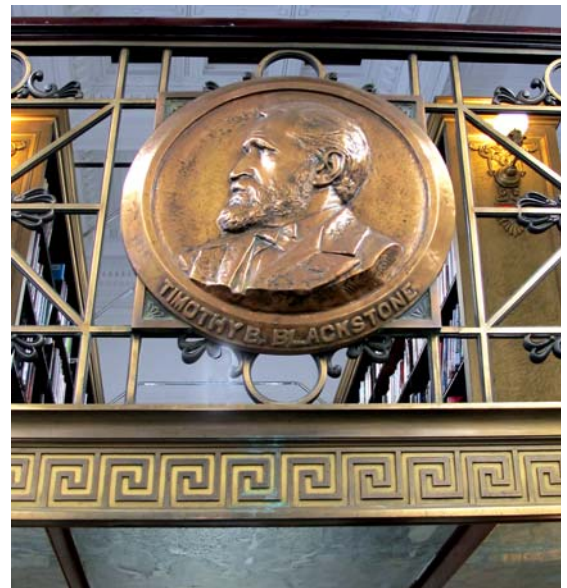




The domed rotunda at the Blackstone Library provides a formal and grand entrance to the interior; the space retains its Classical-style floor mosaics, marble-clad walls and columns, and domed ceiling with murals.







The shelving or “stack room” south of the rotunda with its mezzanine (top). The bronze medallion of Timothy B. Blackstone at the mezzanine railing (above) was created by New York sculptor William Couper. The structural slab glass floor of the mezzanine (left) allows light to reach the shelving on the lower level.

precedents and had an enormous influence on architecture in England and the American colonies in the eighteenth century, most famously Thomas Jefferson's Monticello (1794-1809) and University of Virginia (1819) campus. Characteristic features of Palladianism evident at the Blackstone include the pedimented portico on all four elevations of the building, the central rotunda joining the two wings of the building, and the use of a dome for a non-religious building. All of these features are exemplified by one of Palladio's most well-known designs, the Villa Rotunda, at Vicenza, Italy, circa 1550s.

After passing the bronze entrance doors and a small vestibule, one enters a richly finished octagonal rotunda that is the focal point of the library's interior. The white marble-clad walls of the room rise up to a dome with an oculus and mural paintings by Oliver Dennett Grover, discussed in further detail below. The oculus contains a leaded-glass skylight (originally daylighted, but now artificially backlit) with gilt ornamental plaster vaulting. Marble Ionic columns frame large openings in the rotunda that lead to the stack and reading rooms. The space is illuminated by large bronze light standards set into niches in the walls of the rotunda. Green and cream marble mosaic covers the floor in a design that radiates out from a disc of red marble at the center.

The south side of the rotunda opens onto a room containing the library's shelving stacks. The banks of bronze and steel shelving occupy the full height of the room. The higher shelves are accessed by a pair of staircases that lead up to a delicate steel and bronze mezzanine structure. The floor of the mezzanine is 1-½-thick structural glass slabs designed to allow light to pass through to the lower banks of shelves. The ceiling is pierced with leaded glass skylights framed with ornamental plaster beams and molding. The ceilings of the two reading are similarly treated, although all of the skylights have been covered on their exterior.

A bronze medallion depicting the bust of Timothy Blackstone in low relief decorates an ornamental railing which wraps around the front of the mezzanine. The bust is signed by William Couper (1853-1942) an American sculptor based in New York known for his portrait busts who also served on the advisory committee for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

The library's two reading rooms are located to the north and west of the rotunda. The larger room north of the rotunda measures 30 by 45 feet; the smaller reading room to the west of the rotunda was originally intended for children. Both are furnished with wainscoting, built-in shelving and pedimented window openings all executed in mahogany. A large globe mounted on a pedestal in the main reading room is not original to the building but appears to be added early on.

#### *Murals by Oliver Dennett Grover*

The dome of the rotunda is decorated with four semicircular lunette paintings created by Chicago artist Oliver Dennett Grover. Each measuring 14 by 9 feet, the allegorical murals convey the themes of *Literature*, *Science*, *Labor* and *Art*. The murals were painted on canvas and pasted to the plaster dome surface with white lead. Grover used a light color palette which harmonizes with the light-colored marble and floor of the rotunda. The composition of each





The large reading room (above) occupying the north wing of the library and the small reading room (below) west of the rotunda as they appeared in 1904. The rooms retain their historic wall, floor and ceiling finishes as well as the wainscoting, built-in shelving and tables.



painting is dominated by a central figure of a winged woman surrounded by other figures of men and women who portray branches of the painting's symbolic theme.

In the *Art* mural, the central figure holds a mirror, and is surrounded by women depicted as a painter, sculptor, architect, and harpist to represent four branches of the fine arts. *Literature* is depicted as a woman with a scroll and pen in hand surrounded by figures of an old man holding a book (history), a lute-playing woman (poetry), a woman holding a mask (drama), and a woman casting flowers (fiction) described by Grover as "a girl of present-day type scattering the poesies of human thought." A woman with a lamp symbolizes *Science*, encircled by a man with a beaker (chemistry), women with a telescope and miner's hammer (astronomy and geology), and a woman feeding a peacock (zoology). *Labor* is symbolized by a woman holding a mason's trowel accompanied by a miner, farmer, weaver and the figure of a woman carrying a steam locomotive. Each mural is separated by a pendentive arch decorated with painted papyrus plants to symbolizing the ancient basis of writing. (With a grant from the State of Illinois, the Chicago Public Library completely cleaned and restored the murals in 2009 to remove damage caused by age and water infiltration.)

The artist Oliver Dennett Grover was born in Earlville, Illinois, in 1861 and by the time of his death in 1927 was regarded as one of Chicago's foremost painters. He trained as an artist in Munich, Venice and Paris before settling in Chicago where, in addition to painting, he was active in local arts organizations and taught at the Art Institute. As with the Blackstone Library, Grover also collaborated with architect Solon S. Beman for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition where he painted murals for Beman's Merchant Tailors' Building as well as murals for Beman's James Blackstone Library in Branford. Though he maintained a studio in the Fine Arts Building, Grover painted the Blackstone murals at the photography studio of Mrs. Beman in Kenwood.

#### *The Children's Annex (1939)*

In 1929 the Chicago Public Library purchased a house immediately south of the Blackstone Library for a proposed addition. Rather than demolishing the structure and proceeding with the new addition, the house was retained and adapted to serve some of the library's functions, possibly due to the onset of the Great Depression. It would be another decade before the Children's Annex was completed in 1939.

The one story annex measures 96 by 35 feet and is clad in Indiana limestone. The addition harmonizes with the original building from 1904 in its use of large punched window openings separated by pilasters and flat stone wall surfaces. The mass of the addition also steps back from the older building and is connected to it by a small passage at the south elevation. The interior contains two reading rooms and a basement auditorium.

The annex was built with federal funds (approximately 45% of the cost) through the Public Works Administration (PWA), begun in 1933 as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal meant to stimulate economic recovery through the construction of public-works projects throughout the country. Typical projects included street and road improvements, infrastructure work, and the construction and enlargement of publicly-owned buildings, including schools, fire and police stations, libraries, and hospitals. Some projects were built directly by the federal





The dome of the rotunda is decorated with four semicircular lunette paintings created by Chicago artist Oliver Dennett Grover. Each represents an allegorical theme, including *Literature* (top), *Science* (second from top). Within each mural, subthemes are represented by female figures such as *Architecture* (far left) and *Transportation* (left).

government, but most were built by state and local governments in combination with federal funds. In Chicago, dozens of buildings were built or enlarged during the 1930s using PWA money. Stylistically, many PWA-funded buildings were built in a visually-spare, modernized version of Classicism that has been labeled “PWA Moderne” by some architectural historians. The Blackstone Library annex, with its rectilinear form, limestone cladding, and spare detailing, is a typical, if modest, example of such PWA-funded architecture.

## ARCHITECT SOLON S. BEMAN

Solon S. Beman (1854-1914), the architect of the Blackstone Library, was one of Chicago’s most prominent architects in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A native of Brooklyn, New York, Beman received his architectural training in the office of renowned New York architect Richard Upjohn, where he helped design the Connecticut State Capital. Beman came to Chicago in 1879 at the request of railroad magnate George Pullman to design Pullman, the nation’s first planned company town.

Now located on Chicago’s Far South Side, the town of Pullman was built between 1880 and 1894 as a community and included a factory complex for Pullman’s railroad car company as well as more than 1,300 houses, a town market building, and several public buildings such as a hotel, church, school, and theater. Beman designed Pullman’s buildings to be both visually appealing and well-constructed, with exceptional lighting and ventilation. Long blocks of red-brick row houses feature a variety of elevations and detailing that create an overall picturesque appearance. Several architectural styles are evident in the town’s commercial and institutional buildings, such as the Queen Anne-style Hotel Florence, the Gothic Revival-style Greenstone Church building, and the Classical Revival-style Market Hall. At a time when most industrial buildings were nondescript, Pullman’s Administration Building was capped with an impressive 40-foot-high clock tower and featured graceful Romanesque arches.

Beman went on to design many luxurious homes in Chicago during the 1880s and 1890s, only a few of which are extant. These include the Chateau-esque-style W.W. Kimball Mansion at 1801 Prairie Avenue (1887) and the Queen Anne-style Marshall Field, Jr. Mansion at 1919 S. Prairie (1884), both located within the Prairie Avenue Chicago Landmark District. He also designed the Chateau-esque-style Griffiths-Burroughs House at 3804 S. Michigan Ave. (1892) for one of Chicago’s leading building contractors. (The house is a designated Chicago Landmark.) Beman’s surviving residential work also includes the eccentric Thomlinson House at 5317 S. University Ave. (1904), which features a rock-faced stone facade and large gambrel roof, and the Queen Anne-style Turner House at 4935 S. Greenwood Avenue (1888; within the Kenwood Chicago Landmark District).

Although noted for his residential designs, the versatile Beman also received commissions for factories, commercial blocks, railroad stations, exposition buildings and churches, including a number of Christian Science church buildings. Throughout his multi-faceted career, Beman also designed many buildings outside of Chicago, such as the Procter and Gamble factories in





Solon S. Beman (1854-1914, top left), the architect of the Blackstone Library, was one of Chicago's most prominent architects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Beman is best known for his design of the industrial town of Pullman on Chicago's far South Side (1880-1894), including the Administration Building (bottom left, 1880). Other prominent buildings designed by Beman include Chicago's Grand Central Station (top right, 1888-90, demolished); the First Church of Christ, Scientist, at 4019 S. Drexel Blvd. (middle right, 1897); and the Fine Arts Building (a designated Chicago Landmark) at 410 S. Michigan Avenue (bottom right, 1885, 1898).

Cincinnati, Ohio; the Studebaker plant in South Bend, Indiana; the Pabst Building in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and the Berger Building in Pittsburgh.

Originally designed by Beman in 1885 as a factory-showroom building for the Studebaker Carriage Company, the Fine Arts Building at 410 S. Michigan Avenue was remodeled and expanded by Beman in 1898 as an artist's studio building. (The Fine Arts Building is individually designated as a Chicago Landmark and is located in the Historic Michigan Boulevard Chicago Landmark District.) The building became renowned as an important center of Chicago artistic and cultural endeavor.

Other prominent Chicago buildings by Beman included Grand Central Station at Harrison and Wells (1891; demolished) and the Pullman Building on the southwest corner of S. Michigan Ave. and E. Adams St. (1883, demolished for the Borg-Warner Building). Grand Central Station was arguably Chicago's grandest 19th-century railroad station, with massive brick walls and a 247-foot-tall clock tower designed in a severely-cubic Norman Romanesque Revival style. The station had a massive waiting room seating 1,800 people, a hotel, and an iron-and-glass train shed that was considered an engineering marvel at the time of its completion. Occupying a prominent location on Michigan Avenue, and one of the first tall buildings along the lakefront avenue, the Pullman Building combined offices for the Pullman Company with rental offices, apartments, and the rooftop Albion Inn restaurant which opened onto an open-air, glass-covered promenade and garden court.

In the last two decades of Beman's life, he became best known nationally for his Christian Science church buildings. In 1897 he designed his first building for the rapidly-growing denomination, the First Church of Christ, Scientist, at 4019 S. Drexel Blvd. in Chicago's Oakland neighborhood. In the following years, Beman converted to Christian Science and became close friends with the denomination's founder, Mary Baker Eddy. With her encouragement, Beman became the de facto "house architect" for Christian Science, designing approximately two dozen church buildings nationwide, including the Mother Church Extension for the denomination's headquarters in Boston. Beman believed that the Classical Revival style, combined with auditorium plans and seating, suited Christian Science's liturgical focus on the spoken word and visually distinguished the denomination from more traditional Christian denominations, for which medieval styles such as Gothic and Romanesque predominated. His Classical Revival-style designs established the style as the one most often used for this first generation of Christian Science church buildings in the United States.

During his lifetime, Beman enjoyed the wide respect of his peers, and his work was championed by several architectural critics, including Thomas Tallmadge and Montgomery Schuyler. When in 1914 the *Western Architect* proposed a "hall of fame" to honor the great architects of the Midwest, Beman was included with John Wellborn Root, Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler on the publication's original list of deserving inductees. As Beman scholar Thomas Schlereth aptly observed, "Perhaps only in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America could an architectural career begin and end with such disparate clients as George Pullman and Mary Baker Eddy. Yet Beman served them both well."

## THE CLASSICAL REVIVAL STYLE

The Blackstone Library was designed by architect Solon S. Beman as a Classical Revival-style building. The use and adaptation of a long-standing historic architectural style to a modern building type (a public library branch building) is consistent with how Americans in general, and Chicagoans in particular, saw architectural design in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. With a few exceptions, most Americans wanted buildings that were modern and up-to-date in function, but were designed using traditional architectural styles and materials. In that context, the Classical Revival style remained an important part of American cultural life.

The Classical tradition in architecture and design is one of the oldest and most significant traditions in Western civilization, influential from its origins in the Greek city-states of the fifth century, BC, through the present day. The architecture of ancient Greek temples and sacred buildings was widely admired by other Mediterranean cultures, including ancient Rome, which incorporated Greek Classical architectural forms and details in its buildings throughout its empire which encompassed regions as far flung as Britain, North Africa, Spain, and Persia.

The effort to keep Classical architecture as a living architecture was an important part of the Italian Renaissance, when architects sought to revive Classicism through a melding of ancient Roman Classical forms with contemporary building types, including palaces and churches. Sixteenth-century Italian architect Andrea Palladio (1508-80) was perhaps most influential in this period in transforming Classical architecture from a form of archaeology into an architectural style that could be adapted to a range of building types and budgets. His *Quattro Libri*, or *Four Books on Architecture*, published in 1570, formed the basis of what has come to be known as Palladianism, an academic current within Classical Revival architecture that stressed symmetry, proportion, and the use of temple-fronts with pediments and colonnades, all features evident in the design of the Blackstone Library.

The popularity of Classicism as a source and inspiration continued through the Baroque era of the 17th century, the Rococo and Neoclassical periods of the 18th and early 19th centuries, and the Greek Revival, Renaissance Revival and Classical Revival periods of the 19th and early 20th centuries in America. Classical design was seen as a significant aspect of Western civilization, and buildings intended to house important cultural, economic, or social institutions, whether public or private, often utilized Classical forms and ornament as part of their designs. By the early 1900s, the Classical style was increasingly adapted to a wide variety of building types, including banks, university buildings, railroad stations, hotels, museums and libraries that were developed as large-scale, densely-populated cities grew through industrialization and migration.

In addition, by the late 1800s architects in both Europe and America increasingly were learning their professions in architecture schools. The most prominent ones, including the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, taught students how to design complex modern buildings while cloaking them in





Classicism was a popular motif for public library buildings like the Blackstone Library, especially the many libraries donated by Andrew Carnegie during the same period as the Blackstone. Examples of Carnegie libraries from the Madison Carnegie Library (circa 1900, top) in Madison, Minnesota; the Carnegie Library in Guthrie, Oklahoma (1903, middle); and the Carnegie Library in Atlanta, Georgia (1902, bottom).



historic architectural styles. Classicism was especially favored due to its historically-strong connections to the roots of Western civilization, unmatched by any other architectural style.

The emerging focus on “Beaux-Arts” academic training and taste in American architecture came at the same time as the World’s Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago’s Jackson Park in 1893. This grandly-scaled “White City” of Classical Revival-style exposition buildings and monuments on the city’s south lakefront was immensely influential in the popularization of the style, both among Chicagoans and throughout the United States in the subsequent decades.

In the years before the 1893 fair, Beman had largely designed in the Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, and Chateau-esque styles. For the fair itself, however, Beman turned to the Classical Revival style, designing both an intimately-scaled Merchant Tailors Building as well as the much larger Mines and Mining Building. The Merchant Tailors Building, with its lovely saucer dome and Ionic-columned portico, is a direct predecessor to the Blackstone Library and is similar in its small scale and refined use of Greek-influenced classical forms and ornament. Beman’s embrace of the Classical Revival style for the library fit well with the general architectural tastes in America during the early 1900s.

#### *Library architecture in the early 1900s*

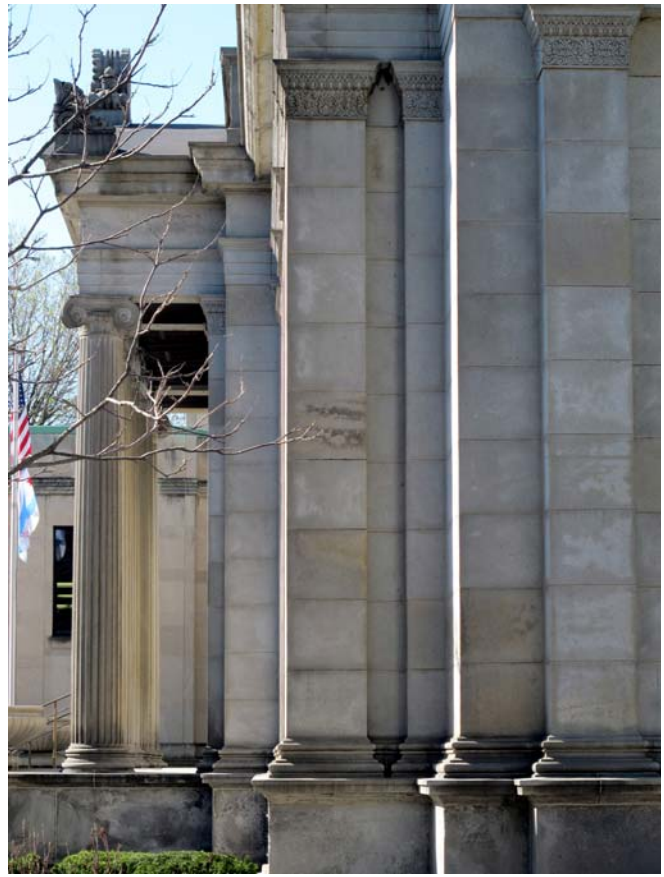
Turn-of-the-century architectural training and taste especially encouraged the Classical Revival for cultural buildings such as museums and libraries, with the association of the style with higher learning underscoring the function of these building types. Both large central libraries such as the New York Public Library and Chicago Public Library were built in the 1890s and early 1900s as grandly-conceived Classical-style buildings.

More apropos to the Blackstone Library is the use of Classicism for smaller-scale urban branch libraries and small city and town libraries. Throughout the United States, towns and cities built public libraries in the late 1800s and early 1900s, often with money given by wealthy donors such as Isabel Blackstone or, most famously, industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who provided funds for the construction of over 1,600 libraries throughout the nation and abroad between 1883 and 1929. Most often these libraries were built using designs that were formal, symmetrical, and ornamented with Classical details, often with main entrances marked by Classical porticos with columns and pediments. These “civic temples” were conceived as cultural cornerstones for their communities, and the Classical Revival style was considered appropriate for such buildings due to its historic associations with Western civilization, culture and learning. The Blackstone Library was not built with Carnegie funds and is more grandly-detailed than the average “Carnegie library,” but it exemplifies the common attraction for Classicism shared by those who commissioned libraries using Carnegie’s funds.

## **CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION**

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect. 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, object, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated





A selection of the Classical Revival details from the Blackstone Library.



“criteria for landmark designation,” as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Blackstone Library be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

### ***Criteria 1: Critical Part of the City’s Heritage***

*Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- With its stately Classical Revival-style architecture and grand interior spaces, the Blackstone Library exemplifies the historic ideal of the free public library as an aesthetic and cultural enrichment in their communities.
- As the first purpose-built library branch in the city, the Blackstone represents the Chicago Public Library’s early efforts to serve the needs of residents in the city’s rapidly growing neighborhoods as it built branch libraries to replace earlier delivery stations and reading rooms.
- The Blackstone Library conveys the prominent role successful business figures played in the development of Chicago’s cultural institutions. The library is a memorial to Timothy B. Blackstone, a prominent Chicago railroad executive, the first president of the Union Stock Yards, and a beloved philanthropist to several of Chicago’s cultural and charitable organizations.
- As a gift from Isabel Norton Blackstone, the Blackstone Library exemplifies the important role women played in the establishment of free public libraries in America.
- The Blackstone Library’s use of Classical Revival-style architecture conveys the ideals of the City Beautiful, a movement promulgated in Chicago with the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition which influenced city planning as well as the construction of Classical-style public buildings throughout the nation.
- Architect Solon S. Beman’s design for the Blackstone Library is based on his earlier Merchant Tailors Building at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, and, as such, the library conveys the architectural influence of that important event in Chicago’s history.

### ***Criterion 4: Important Architecture***

*Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.*

- The Blackstone Library is an excellent example of the Classical Revival style of architecture with its Ionic Order columns, hexastyle portico, symmetrical facade arrangement, gabled pediments on each facade, and low dome.

- With its central rotunda flanked by wings, evidencing symmetry, proportion, and the use of temple-fronts with pediments, colonnades and other Classical features and details, the Blackstone Library exhibits the continuing influence of noted sixteenth-century Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508-80) on American architecture.
- The Blackstone Library displays a high degree of craftsmanship and detailing in traditional materials, exemplified in its carved granite exterior details and carved marble interior finishes, marble floor mosaics, ornamental plaster, leaded glass skylight, and light fixtures.
- The Blackstone Library includes exceptional interior spaces exemplifying the importance of the building in terms of its architecture, type, style and design. The entrance vestibule and domed rotunda provide a formal and grand entrance to the interior of the library, and the space retains its Classical-style floor mosaics, marble walls and columns, and domed ceiling with murals. The Building also includes a shelving stack room with a glass-floored mezzanine, and large and small reading rooms which retain their historic finishes and ornamentation.
- The skylighted dome of the rotunda of the Blackstone Library is decorated with allegorical murals painted by noted Chicago painter Oliver Dennett Grover which symbolize the themes of *Literature, Science, Labor and Art*.

### ***Criterion 5: Important Architect***

*Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- Solon S. Beman (1854-1914), the architect of the Blackstone Library, was one of Chicago's most prominent architects in the late 19th and early 20th centuries best known as the architect of Pullman from 1880 to 1894, the nation's first planned industrial town.
- In addition to Pullman, Beman is known for his luxurious residential designs from the 1880s and 1890s, including the Chateau-esque-style W.W. Kimball Mansion at 1801 Prairie Avenue (1887) and the Queen Anne-style Marshall Field, Jr. Mansion at 1919 S. Prairie (1884), both located within the Prairie Avenue Chicago Landmark District. He also designed the Chateau-esque-style Griffiths-Burroughs House at 3804 S. Michigan Ave. (1892, a designated Chicago Landmark).
- Beman was a multi-faceted architect who designed a range of building types, including the Grand Central Station at Harrison and Wells (1891; demolished); and the Pullman Building on the southwest corner of S. Michigan Ave. and E. Adams St. (1883, demolished for the Borg-Warner Building). In addition to his work in Chicago, Beman designed the Procter and Gamble factories in



The Blackstone Library possesses excellent integrity. Views of the exterior in 1904 (top) and in 2010 (middle), and the interior rotunda in 1904 (bottom left) and in 2010 (bottom right).





Cincinnati, Ohio; the Studebaker plant in South Bend, Indiana; the Pabst Building in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and the Berger Building in Pittsburgh.

- In the last two decades of Beman's life, he became best known nationally as the official architect for the rapidly growing Christian Science denomination, designing such churches as the First Church of Christ, Scientist, at 4019 S. Drexel Blvd. in Chicago's Oakland neighborhood in 1897, and the Byzantine-style Mother Church Extension, built in 1906 at the First Church of Christ, Scientist, Boston, Massachusetts.
- During his lifetime, Beman enjoyed the wide respect of his peers, and his work was championed by several architectural critics, including Thomas Tallmadge and Montgomery Schuyler.

### ***Integrity Criteria***

*The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architecture or aesthetic value.*

The Blackstone Library possesses excellent integrity, and the building continues to serve the same function within the Kenwood neighborhood more than a century after it was first constructed. On the exterior, the building retains its original design and masonry wall materials which display a high degree of craftsmanship, particularly in the carved granite ornamentation. Similarly, the entrance vestibule and rotunda possess a very high degree of integrity in terms of their original plan, function, ornamentation, fixtures, and finishes.

Changes to the building have been relatively minor. At some point in the past, the cladding of the low dome was changed from raised copper shingles to standing-seam copper. Another prior change to the original design was the covering over of the skylights on the exterior with roofing material. These changes are reversible and do not detract from the building's overall capacity to express its architectural and aesthetic value. More recently, the windows have been replaced with new windows that match the configuration of the historic windows.

The Blackstone Library includes the annex addition constructed in 1939 immediately south of the 1904 building. The addition is the same height as the original 1904 building, and the addition is pulled away from the original building and connected with a minimal 'hyphen' connection. The addition does not diminish the original 1904 building from expressing its historic community, architecture or aesthetic value.

In 2009 the murals in the rotunda by Oliver Dennett Grover were restored, and the project was recognized by the Hyde Park Historical Society with a Leon and Marian Despres Architectural Preservation Award.

## **SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES**

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the “significant historical and architectural features” of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon its evaluation of the Blackstone Library, the Commission recommends that the significant features be identified for each bank building as follows:

- all exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the original 1904 building; and
- the following major historic interior spaces in their entirety of the original 1904 building: the entrance vestibule; the rotunda; the "stack room" south of the rotunda, including the glass-floored mezzanine; the large reading room north of the rotunda; and the small reading room west of the rotunda. Historic features of these identified interior spaces include, but are not limited to, the overall historic spatial volume; historic decorative wall, floor, and ceiling finishes and ornamentation; original murals in the rotunda; skylights; historic light fixtures; wood wainscoting and historic shelving; and other original built-in fixtures.

The 1939 annex addition immediately south of the 1904 building is specifically not identified as a significant historical or architectural feature.



**With federal funding from the Public Works Administration (PWA), an addition (shown at left in the photo above) was built to the south of the Blackstone Library in 1939.**

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#### Illustrations

Chicago Department of Zoning and Land Use Planning: pp. 2, 8, 10, 12 (top and bottom right), 16 (middle and bottom right), 22, 25 (middle), 27.

Chicago Public Library, Special Collections: p. 12 (top left), 14, 25 (top, bottom right and left)

Chicago Public Library. 1985. *The Chicago Public Library: the historical development of an urban library*: p. 7.

*Chicago Tribune* June 24, 1902, p. 5 (top).

*Chicago Tribune* Oct. 1, 1928, p. 5 (bottom left).

Historic American Buildings Survey (Library of Congress): p. 11 HABS VA,2-CHAR.V,1-, Monticello, State Route 53 vicinity, Charlottesville vicinity, Albemarle County, VA; p. 16 (bottom left) HABS ILL,16-CHIG,90-Pullman Company Administration Building & Shops, 1101 South Cottage Grove Street, Chicago, Cook County, IL; p. 20 (top) HABS MINN,37-MAD,2- Madison Carnegie Library, 401 Sixth Avenue, Madison, Lac Qui Parle County, MN; p. 20 (middle) HABS OKLA,42-GUTH,1D- Carnegie Library, 402 East Oklahoma Avenue, Guthrie, Logan County, OK; p. 20 (bottom) HABS GA,61-ATLA,12- Carnegie Library of Atlanta, 126 Carnegie Way, Atlanta, Fulton County, GA.

*Sir Banister Fletcher's history of architecture*: p. 11 (top right and left).

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