

APPLICATION

Case # 85-1

Date 2-7-86

ROCK ISLAND
PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Nomination for Landmark Designation

Common Street Address of Property: 4th Avenue and 19th Street

Legal Description of Property (available from abstract or County Recorder of Deeds office): Lots 1, 2, and 3, Block 18 in Spencer and Case's Addition.

Name and Address of Property Owner: Rock Island Public Library Board of Directors, 4th Avenue & 19th Street, Rock Island, Illinois 61201

Please provide the following information:

1. A written statement describing the property and setting forth reasons for requesting designation (attach information and sources to this application form).
2. Map indicating location of property proposed for designation (assistance available from Planning Division).
3. Recent photograph (copies of old photographs or drawings may also be included).
4. Indicate whether or not the owner is aware of the proposed designation.

Please refer to the criteria listed on the reverse side when preparing the landmark designation (These are excerpted from the Rock Island Preservation Ordinance).

Name(s) and Address(es) of Applicant(s):

James F. Warwick
Signature

James F. Warwick, Library Director
Name

4th Ave. & 19th Street
Address

788-7627
Telephone

ROCK ISLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Rock Island Public Library has served the citizens of Rock Island for well over 100 years, 81 of which have been in its present building. This structure would never have been built were it not for the generosity of businessman Frederick Weyerhauser, at that time reputed to be one of the richest men in the country, and the initiative of local citizen Colonel Walker. Its architecture was recognized as unique, not only for the surrounding area but for the state as well, excepting Chicago. The following paragraphs describe in greater detail the history of the building and its appearance.

Rock Island Public Library, organized from former library associations dating back to 1855, opened its doors to the public November 25, 1872, the first public library to do so in the state of Illinois. It was located in rooms in the old Mitchell and Lynde Building.

By 1899, it was imperative that a new building be acquired. A Building Committee headed by Colonel Charles Walker was formed. On March 6, 1900, the committee reported that they had secured a contract for the sale of the North 65 feet of Lots 1 and 2, Block 18 in Spencer and Case's Addition.

According to the minutes of the Board of Director's meeting of December 4, 1900, "the building is to be located on the S.E. corner of 19th Street and 4th Avenue, both paved with brick, and is to face 19th Street which runs north and south. The lot is level and is 150 feet on 19th Street by 120 feet on 4th Avenue. On the south end of the lot there is a 20-foot alley." (Thirty feet on 4th Avenue, the west half of Lot 3, was added in December 1905 by Frederick Weyerhauser's gift and the east half of Lot 3 was purchased in 1950.)

Preliminary plans and estimates resulted in a figure of \$70,000 which was far beyond the means of the Library Board. Colonel Walker decided to appeal to Frederick Weyerhauser, at that time living in St. Paul.

Frederick Weyerhauser began his meteoric career in Rock Island in 1856 after emigrating from Germany. He was married to the sister-in-law of his partner Frederick Denkmann in the Denkmann grocery store on 4th Avenue, which occupied land now part of the Library property. He joined with Frederick Denkmann to develop the immense Weyerhauser and Denkmann lumber business which spread from Rock Island to St. Paul and eventually encompassed thousands of acres in the Northwest.

After his interview with Mr. Weyerhauser, Colonel Walker reported to the Board: "Mr. Weyerhauser proposed that if the Board will proceed to erect a fireproof building upon the lot recently purchased, which will be an ornament to our city, he will advance the sum of \$50,000 to the Board, the same to be paid back to him with 5% interest out of taxes to be raised." To this was added a gift of \$10,000 and he later made two more substantial gifts in order to prevent economy measures that would compromise the beauty of the building.

A contest was held for the best plans and specifications, the winner of which was Drack and Kerns, prominent local architects who designed many elegant homes in the city.

A classic design was chosen with Ionic pillars rising through two storeys across the front of the building. The imposing entry features a heavily scrolled and decorated pediment. On the frieze around the top of the building are inscribed the

ROCK ISLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY

names of literary giants of various nations, such as Shakespeare, Virgil, Dante, Longfellow and Tegner. At the time of construction the building was considered fireproof and had a ground area of 95 by 70 feet.

On October 10, 1901, a representative of the Cleveland Stone Company of North Amherst, Ohio, was present at the Board meeting with samples of Gray Canyon stone. At the same meeting a contract was drawn up with Collins Brothers, a well known local construction company who had secured the bid, for "the erection of the building covered by their bid of such Gray Canyon stone, with Carthage marble for the foyer and steps."

The original flooring of the building is maple. The decoration of the main floor was described as "done in golden oak and in the Italian Renaissance style."

A marble stairway leads to the second floor which had a rotunda, allowing an opening for a skylight. The rotunda, now closed, is to be reconstructed.

A box containing articles of local historical significance was placed in the corner stone. These included newspapers, library records and other documents. The stone was set in place on August 23, 1902.

A special meeting of the Board on April 13, 1903, drew up propositions for sub-contractors to "furnish all materials of the best quality and complete in first class workmanlike and artistic manner" the interior of the building.

On opening day, December 15, 1903, the Argus described the building as "surpassing anything in its line in the state outside of Chicago.

The pride of the Board of Directors in their achievement is reflected in their report to the Mayor for that year, which states "We confidently expect very soon to occupy as a home for the Library, a building that will be a source of pride to every citizen of Rock Island."

The Library is an important and enduring part of the Rock Island Community. The effort made in 1903 by a number of prominent individuals to insure the construction of a building of lasting quality resulted in a structure that was and remains, "an ornament to our city." We feel that its unique architectural features, as well as the history and people involved in its construction, make the building suitable for landmark status.