

# LANDMARK DESIGNATION APPLICATION FOR THE ORIGINAL NICHOLS LIBRARY BUILDING

110 S. Washington Street, Naperville, Illinois

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06/05/2017



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## DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY AND ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS

### **Summary Paragraph**

The original Nichols Library is located at 110 South Washington Street in downtown Naperville on the east side of Washington Street, Naperville's north-south thoroughfare and primary route into the downtown area. Built between 1897 and 1898, the structure is an excellent example of the Richardsonian Romanesque architectural style. The library was designed by Mifflin Emlen (M.E.) Bell, a well-known architect of public buildings. The library is a rectangular, two-story brick and limestone structure. The south wing, erected in 1962, is a noncontributing resource of the historic property. The brick trash enclosure at the rear of the building is also noncontributing.

### **Narrative Statement**

The original Nichols Library at 110 South Washington Street was built between 1897 and 1898 by the City of Naperville. The library was made possible by a bequest in the will of James Lawrence Nichols I, a successful author and professor at Naperville's North-Western College (now North Central College). The \$10,000 donated by Nichols allowed the city to purchase property and pay construction costs.<sup>1</sup> The *Naperville Clarion* stated that "the building, when erected, must be perpetually used as a free public library."<sup>2</sup> The structure was designed by M.E. Bell, a nationally recognized architect of civic buildings. Bell frequently employed the Richardsonian Romanesque, a popular architectural style during the late-nineteenth century, attributed to famed American architect Henry Hobson Richardson. The monumentality of the style, expressed through heavy masonry, made it appropriate for civic buildings. Richardsonian design enhanced the reputation of institutions; it suggested permanence and stability.

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<sup>1</sup> Miriam B. Fry, *History of Nichols Library* [1969], in the Naperville Heritage Digital Collection, <http://www.idaillinois.org>, pp. 19-20; Elizabeth Barnard Nichols, *Story of the Life of J.L. Nichols* [1931], in the Naperville Heritage Digital Collection, <http://www.idaillinois.org>, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> "Nichols Library and Library Building," *Naperville Clarion*, 22 June 1898.

The structure is located in downtown Naperville on Washington Street, Naperville's north-south thoroughfare and main artery into the downtown area. The property lies on the east side of the street just south of the intersection of Van Buren and Washington Streets. The rear facade faces the western edge of Central Park. Dutch Elm Disease has depleted much of the park's foliage since the time of the library's construction.<sup>3</sup>

The Nichols Library is a brick and limestone structure of two stories. The footprint of the building is rectangular and its foundation limestone. The building's limestone was quarried in Naperville.<sup>4</sup> The main entrance is located on the west (main) facade facing Washington Street. The north half of the main facade includes two series of double-hung windows along the first and second stories. Each double-hung window is topped with a rough-faced limestone lintel. The double-hung windows along the second story also have rough-faced limestone sills. Large clerestory windows span from the first floor to the second floor on the south half of the west facade. These large windows provided natural reading light by allowing generous amounts of sunlight to pass into the open, two-story reading room. The clerestory windows are also topped with rough-faced limestone lintels.

Characteristic of the Richardsonian design is the hipped roof with parapeted cross gables. Affixed to the soffits of the building's wide eaves are unadorned wood modillions. Historically the roof was slate<sup>5</sup> but is now covered with asphalt shingles. Corbelled brick chimneys once extended from the north, south, and east sides of the roof.

The center section of the main facade is stepped slightly forward so as to draw attention to the entrance. Rock-faced limestone quoins outline this center section. The use of rough-faced limestone is a key component of the Richardsonian style because it enhances the main entrance's sense of depth and,

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<sup>3</sup> "Some Changes Made," *Naperville Sun*, 24 February 1972.

<sup>4</sup> *Souvenir of the Naperville Home Coming* (Naperville, IL: The General Committee, 1917), in the Naperville Heritage Digital Collection, <http://www.idaillinois.org>, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

most importantly, the building's feeling of immense, fortresslike weight. Double doors are pushed back into the entrance providing further sense of depth. The main entry is framed by an arch of limestone voussoirs, a hallmark of the style and representative of its Romanesque component.<sup>6</sup> Deep-set sidelights flank both sides of the entrance. The recessed location of the sidelights within quarry-faced stone also enhances the entrance's sense of depth. Above the entrance are three fixed windows with rough-faced limestone sills. "Nichols Library" is carved into a strip of limestone above said fixed windows. Wrought iron glass globe light fixtures are attached to the tops of the shoulder walls, which flank the entrance stairs. A building plaque – listing the date of construction and names of those involved – is located in the main entrance vestibule. While the building's original interior has been drastically altered, the *Naperville Clarion* captured in words its 1898 appearance:

To the right of the wide hall, and separated by arches, is the reading room, with three long tables, chairs and mantel. In the hall is another carved mantel surmounted by a large mirror which reflects the handsome doorway and arches on both sides. To the left is the room for books....[I]n the center is an iron staircase leading to a gallery above—a charming place for book-worms. In the rear of the building are smaller rooms....One is to be used for business meetings and is furnished with table and chairs. These rooms open on a wide veranda facing Central Park, which is a lovely retreat on warm summer afternoon.<sup>7</sup>

Rock-faced limestone decoration is found throughout. The quarry-faced limestone compliments the brick superstructure in a way that enhances texture and decoration. Rock-faced limestone quoins adorn the corners of the facades. The parapeted cross gable above the main entrance is outlined with quarry-faced limestone and includes bell-shaped stone ornament at its base. A single narrow, fixed light is positioned within the center of the gable. The light is supported by rock-faced stone sill and lintel. Historically, a flag pole was attached to the peak of this gable.

The north elevation is very similar in appearance to the west elevation. Double-hung windows are arranged along the first and second floors. The center section is pushed slightly forward and is outlined

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<sup>6</sup> Ira J. Bach, *A Guide to Chicago's Historic Suburbs on Wheels and on Foot* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1981), 375; John J.-G Blumenson, *Identifying American Architecture* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1981), 47.

<sup>7</sup> "Nichols Library and Library Building," *Naperville Clarion*, 22 June 1898.

with quoins. The parapeted cross gable matches that of the west facade. The north facade remains unaltered from its 1898 appearance.

The east elevation, which faces Central Park, has three sets of windows evenly spaced along its second story. A hip roof dormer is located in the center of the roof. Historically, a covered porch was attached to the east facade of the building. The porch extended from the underside of the second story windows and had a slightly pitched roof supported by columns. The porch was removed as part of a 1939 children's room addition (seen in the bay that protrudes from the back of the 1898 building).<sup>8</sup> The bay's brickwork and double-hung windows with limestone sills nicely match the appearance of the other facades and as such, does not compromise the aesthetic integrity of the original 1898 building. The detached brick trash enclosure is to be considered a noncontributing component of this landmark nomination. It is not part of the original building nor the 1939 addition. Its date of construction is unknown.

The 1962 wing can be seen while facing the back of the building. The wing wraps around the east facade and extends out from the south facade of the original building. The addition was built to accommodate the library's growing circulation.<sup>9</sup> The south wing shifted focus and attention away from the original library. As part of the 1962 addition, the interior of the original library was completely remodeled and thereafter served as the children's section. Architect Albert R. Martin designed the addition and Concannon & Associates of Naperville was the general contractor.<sup>10</sup> The 1962 wing is considered a noncontributing part of this nomination. The contrast in architectural styles between the original 1898 Richardsonian building and the modernist 1962 wing makes the two structures appear incompatible, mismatched.

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Teague, "The Naperville Public Libraries: Celebrating One Hundred Years of Community Service" (Naperville, IL: Naperville Public Libraries, 1998, photocopied), 3.

<sup>9</sup> "Nichols Library Sees Naperville Grow Up," *Beacon-News*, 7 June 1979.

<sup>10</sup> "Library Benefactors," *Naperville Sun*, [1962], in Nichols File at the Naperville Heritage Society.

The Nichols Library is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing resource within the Naperville Historic District.<sup>11</sup> The building's National Register listing fulfills the fifth criterion for designation of landmarks (Section 6-11-3:2 of the Naperville Municipal Code). National Register listing qualifies the building for the 20% Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit – an excellent option for reuse of the building as an income-generating property.<sup>12</sup>

## **HISTORIC ANALYSIS**

### **Summary Paragraph**

The Nichols Library also meets Criteria for the Designation of Landmarks (Sec. 6-11-3:2 Municipal Code) for its association with notable resident James L. Nichols I and outstanding Richardsonian Romanesque architectural design. Built in 1898, the building was the first home of the Naperville Public Libraries. The institution provided recreation and education to the Naperville community. The building was designed by M.E. Bell, a nationally recognized architect of civic buildings. Bell's Richardsonian design imparted legitimacy and respectability to the nascent public library institution.

### **Narrative Statement**

The legacy of James Lawrence (J.L.) Nichols I (1851-1895) lives on in the form of the Naperville Public Libraries. Originally from Coburg, Germany, Nichols's story embodies the highs and lows of the American immigrant. When he was just six years old, Nichols, accompanied by his mother and stepfather, emigrated to the United States. Destitute, his mother and stepfather worked menial jobs to eke out an existence. The family initially made their home in upstate New York before moving to La Moille, Illinois,

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<sup>11</sup> Eugenia Bae and Carolyn Andrews, "Naperville Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form, Johnson Lasky Architects, Chicago, August 2012. The Naperville Historic District was first listed to the National Register in 1977. The 2012 amendment nomination added properties to the district that had previously been excluded from the 1977 nomination due to the "fifty-year rule" requirement.

<sup>12</sup> For additional information on the tax credit program visit <https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives/before-you-apply.htm>.

where his mother had acquaintances. When Nichols was eight years old his mother died in childbirth. His stepfather then abandoned him, leaving him orphaned in a foreign land. A local German family took him in but treated him cruelly. Starved and frequently abused by the family, he ran away,<sup>13</sup> beginning a long, difficult period characterized by near constant hardship:

He was handed about from one hard and cruel master to another, beaten, neglected, no schooling, no love. Only kicks and cuffs, compelled to sleep in barns and corn cribs, often suffering intensely with cold and hunger, with only an occasional oasis of comfort and sympathy.<sup>14</sup>

Despite these sufferings, Nichols drastically improved his lot through self-education. According to his autobiography, Nichols spent evenings and Sundays reading and studying.<sup>15</sup> In 1880 he graduated with honors from North-Western College (now North Central College) in Naperville, Illinois. The following year he was appointed professor of the Commerce Department at North-Western.<sup>16</sup> During his time at the college, Nichols compiled a handbook of valuable business and legal information. First published in 1886, *The Business Guide*, provided sensible advice and instruction to young men, “reflecting the manners and morals of the Victorian age.”<sup>17</sup> Topics included penmanship, correspondence, banking, contracts, and wills. *The Business Guide* emphasized personal independence and self-determination. Nichols instructed his readers to take responsibility for their futures:

Young men, you are the architects of your own fortunes. Rely upon your own strength of body and soul. Take for your star self-reliance. Don’t take too much advice—keep at your helm and steer your own ship, and remember that the great art of commanding is to take a fair share of the work. Think well of yourself. Strike out. Assume your own position.... Rise above the envious and jealous. Fire above the mark you intend to hit. Energy, invincible determination, with a right motive, are the levers that move the world. Be in earnest. Be self-reliant. Be generous. Be civil.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> James L. Nichols, *Autobiography of James L. Nichols* [1895], in the Naperville Heritage Digital Collection, <http://www.idaillinois.org>, pp. 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Barnard Nichols, *Story of J.L. Nichols*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> J.L. Nichols, *Autobiography*, 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> *Beacon-News*, “Anniversary Today: Library Got Start From Area Immigrant,” 23 September 1973.

<sup>17</sup> Helen Fraser, *Footsteps Through Old Naperville* (Naperville, IL: Naperville Heritage Society, 1982), 24.

<sup>18</sup> J.L. Nichols, *The Business Guide: or, Safe Methods of Business*, 25th ed. (Naperville, IL: J.L. Nichols, 1891), 6-7.



As examples of Victorian-era virtue and masculinity, these ideals loosely resembled those found in other writings of the age:

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run, . . .

Rudyard Kipling, "If—" (written 1895)<sup>19</sup>

The trajectory of Nichols's life calls to mind another literary allusion: the success stories of Horatio Alger. Nichols credited his "rags to riches story" to tireless hard work and a steadfast commitment to learning. The value of education was a central theme of *The Business Guide*. Self-education allowed the author to overcome the troubles that plagued his youth. Prior to his scholastic achievements at Northwestern College, Nichols struggled to obtain a proper education. It took many years of self-betterment before Nichols acquired the education he so desperately sought. According to his wife, Elizabeth Barnard Nichols (1865-1946), dogged hard work was the key to James Nichols's success: "By intense application he managed to master the English language and acquired enough education to secure a certificate to teach a country district school when he was eighteen."<sup>20</sup>

*The Business Guide* brought significant wealth to its author. The self-published book went through multiple printings, selling more than four million copies by the time it finally went out of print. It was also an international bestseller; translated into German and Spanish.<sup>21</sup> Nichols became involved in other business ventures, investing profits earned from book sales into the Naperville Lounge Factory, a new furniture-making company based in Naperville. This company later became Kroehler Manufacturing

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<sup>19</sup> "If—," <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/46473>.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Barnard Nichols, *Story of J.L. Nichols*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Moore and Hiawatha Bray, *Du Page At 150 and Those Who Shaped Our World* (West Chicago, IL: West Chicago Printing Co., 1989), 100.

Company, one of the world's largest producers of upholstered furniture.<sup>22</sup> In 1886 Nichols built a Queen Anne mansion on Chicago Avenue – one of Naperville's showplaces.

Although he attained considerable wealth, Nichols did not forget the hardships that characterized his early life. Shortly before his death in 1895 at the age of forty-four, Nichols bequeathed \$10,000 to the City of Naperville to establish a public library. He did not want children to go without books as he had.<sup>23</sup> The gift was contingent on the city's agreement to maintain the library. Taxpayers would be responsible for upkeep of the building, inventory, and employee wages.<sup>24</sup>

Nichols's gift to the city was an example of Gilded Age philanthropy. Although miniscule compared to the fortunes given away by industrialists like John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, the \$10,000 allowed the city to purchase property and pay construction costs.<sup>25</sup> Before the public library was built, people had to subscribe to private libraries in town.<sup>26</sup>

The Nichols Library, named after the institution's benefactor, broke down restrictions to information. As one of the first public libraries in Du Page County,<sup>27</sup> the Nichols Library democratized access to books and other educational material. Nichols's contribution was a true philanthropic act, meant to improve living conditions within the community. He wanted children to have greater access to books than he had had. In this respect, the Nichols Library played a part in American social history as an attempt to improve the lives of others. Dr. J.A. Bell, first president of the library board, expressed this altruistic spirit in remarks given at the library's dedication service: "This marks the turning of a new leaf in the history of Naperville.... This is not for today, not for tomorrow, but for all the future years, when rich and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Barnard Nichols, *Story of J.L. Nichols*, 17.

<sup>24</sup> "Our Nichols Library," *Naperville Clarion*, 11 August 1949.

<sup>25</sup> Fry, *History of Nichols Library*, 19-20; Elizabeth Barnard Nichols, *Story of J.L. Nichols*, 17.

<sup>26</sup> Fraser, *Footsteps*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Teague, "Naperville Public Libraries," 1.

poor alike may find good books to read and a comfortable place in which to read them.”<sup>28</sup> Dr. Bell also assuaged concerns that the library would raise taxes:

If we pay the debt we owe the past we must make some sacrifices to the future.... We are living in the civilization of the nineteenth century because others were willing to subordinate the present and self-interest to the future, and suffer privation, taxation and worse evils if necessary, that we might live on a higher plane.<sup>29</sup>

Completed in 1898, the building provided an impressive setting for the new institution. The library was built on Washington Street, Naperville’s north-south thoroughfare and central artery. The rear of the building borders the western edge of Naperville’s Central Park. Located in the downtown area, the library occupied a central location within town. Proximity to downtown businesses allowed for maximum visibility and easy access. The June 22, 1898 copy of the *Naperville Clarion* noted that the Site Selection Committee, appointed by the Library Board, recommended the site because of its central location and also because it would link Central Park to a major street (Washington). The site encompassed an entire block, from Washington Street east, to become part of Central Park.<sup>30</sup> Above all however, it was the building’s Richardsonian Romanesque design that increased the prestige and legitimacy of the newborn library.

Mifflin Emlen (M.E.) Bell (1846-1904), an accomplished architect who frequently worked within the Richardsonian Romanesque style, designed the library. Bell occupied an important position within the development of late-nineteenth century American architecture. He apprenticed under French architect A.H. Piquenard, designer of the Illinois State Capitol. At the age of twenty-six, Bell served as superintendent of construction on the Illinois Capitol.<sup>31</sup> He also worked with Piquenard on the Iowa State

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> “Nichols Library and Library Building,” *Naperville Clarion*, 22 June 1898.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> “Obituary: Mifflin E. Bell,” *Inland Architect and News Record* 43 (June 1904): 32.

Capitol.<sup>32</sup> Bell's tutelage under Piquenard and work on the two state capitols provided valuable experience that benefitted his later work for the federal government.<sup>33</sup>

Bell became Supervising Architect of the United States Department of the Treasury in 1883.<sup>34</sup> At thirty-six years of age, he was the youngest man ever appointed to the position. He served under Presidents Chester A. Arthur and Grover Cleveland before resigning in 1887.<sup>35</sup> During his tenure as Supervising Architect, Bell oversaw the design of federal government buildings (several of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places). The building boom of the mid-1880s – the result of a flourishing national economy – meant that federal buildings “were multiplying at a rate of about three a month.”<sup>36</sup> According to one building trades publication, “Bell produced designs in government buildings in nearly all the states of the union.”<sup>37</sup> Fortunately for Bell, a team of draftsmen handled much of the Supervising Architect's design responsibilities. These draftsmen were of vital importance. According to historian Antoinette J. Lee, author of *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect's Office*, although Bell provided what he called “general supervision,” he expected draftsmen to “be competent to prepare drawings for a stone building of considerable size from foundation to turret.”<sup>38</sup>

Bell continued to design public buildings following his resignation from the Supervising Architect's Office in 1887. He relocated to Chicago where he took on commissions for courthouses, high

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<sup>32</sup> Iowa Legislative General Assembly, “Construction & Earlier Buildings,” <https://apps.legis.iowa.gov/Resources/Tour/Historical/Construction.aspx>.

<sup>33</sup> “Obituary: Mifflin E. Bell,” *American Architect and Building News* 84 (June 1904): 93.

<sup>34</sup> “Mifflin E. Bell's Career,” *New York Times*, 31 October 1883.

<sup>35</sup> “Mr. Bell Surprised,” *New York Times*, 22 July 1887; “Obituary: Mifflin E. Bell,” *Inland Architect*, 32.

<sup>36</sup> Antoinette J. Lee, *Architects to the Nation: The Rise and Decline of the Supervising Architect's Office* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 135-36.

<sup>37</sup> *Industrial Chicago: The Building Interests*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Godspeed Publishing Co., 1891), 606.

<sup>38</sup> Lee, *Architects to the Nation*, 136.

schools, churches, and banks.<sup>39</sup> He also continued his work for the federal government as Local Superintendent of Government Buildings in Chicago and in 1891, was appointed Superintendent of Construction for the Government Building at the upcoming 1893 World's Fair.<sup>40</sup> Bell's involvement in preparations for the World's Fair also included a brief stint in 1891 as foreman of the Fair's Building Department under Chief of Construction Daniel Burnham.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately, Bell's time as Superintendent of the Government Building ended on a controversial note when he was accused of fixing bids submitted by contractors. The incident was investigated by the Treasury.<sup>42</sup> The affair tarnished his reputation.

Two notable commissions in Du Page County helped redeem Bell's career: the Naperville National Bank Building and Masonic Lodge (1891) and the Du Page County Courthouse (1896) in Wheaton.<sup>43</sup> Both buildings embodied robust, fully realized versions of Richardsonian style – sheer mass and weight rendered in brick and stone.

Construction of the Nichols Library began in 1897. The cornerstone was laid in October of that year. The construction contract was awarded to Alvin Enck for \$7,498.00. The superintendent was C.L. Schwartz. Contractor Enck's duties included selecting the limestone and managing local help. Enck used limestone quarried in Naperville. Bell received \$239.48 for his work.<sup>44</sup> An opening ceremony for the library was held September 22, 1898. A crowd of three hundred gathered to celebrate. Attendees were asked to contribute materials to the library's start-up collection of five hundred books. A sense of

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<sup>39</sup> "Obituary: Mifflin E. Bell," *Inland Architect*, 32.

<sup>40</sup> "Bids Will Be Asked For Today," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 July 1891.

<sup>41</sup> "Progress Made the Last Week," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 31 January 1891.

<sup>42</sup> "An Investigation of M.E. Bell," *New York Times*, 26 August 1892.

<sup>43</sup> *Industrial Chicago*, 607. Today, the National Bank Building and Masonic Lodge is commonly known as 18 W. Jefferson Ave. The Du Page County Courthouse was listed to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.

<sup>44</sup> Teague, "Naperville Public Libraries," 2.

community pride developed that evening. According to one participant, “Our citizens are justly proud of their noble library. It ought to afford not only diversion to our idle people, but instruction and stimulus to our working people and our thinking people.”<sup>45</sup>

The aesthetics of the Richardsonian design deserve credit for the boost in civic pride. The library’s rough-faced ashlar stonework, a hallmark of the style, imparts a sense of stability and permanence. The entrance is framed by an arch of limestone voussoirs, perhaps the style’s most recognizable feature and its Romanesque component.<sup>46</sup> The eponymous Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture combined the medieval, Romanesque arch with thick masonry walls and rock-faced stonework to create a style that strove for the monumental.<sup>47</sup> Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886) applied this technique to public buildings, such as Boston’s Trinity Church and to private residences, such as Chicago’s John J. Glessner House. The sheer mass of Richardsonian architecture, however, was arguably best suited for large-scale public buildings (Allegheny County Jail and Court House in Pittsburgh).<sup>48</sup>

The Nichols Library’s Richardsonian architecture anticipated the future success and longevity of the Naperville Public Libraries. The public libraries have played an integral role in Naperville’s social life. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Nichols Library was a vital source of information and entertainment for the Naperville public. The library was also known to lend a hand in times of crises. Librarian Mary “Matie” Barbara Egermann (1897-1967) directed many of the library’s community service programs. As chief librarian from 1909 to 1950, Egermann played an instrumental role in the development of the institution’s mission.

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<sup>45</sup> “Our Nichols Library,” *Naperville Clarion*, 11 August 1949.

<sup>46</sup> Bach, *Guide to Chicago’s Historic Suburbs*, 375; Blumenson, *Identifying American Architecture*, 47.

<sup>47</sup> William Morgan, *The Abrams Guide to American House Styles* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 196-197.

<sup>48</sup> Virginia McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 301-302.

Egermann expanded the library's mission. During World War I she led an effort to collect books, periodicals, and money for servicemen overseas. After the war, Egermann organized a drive that sent scrapbooks and baked goods to veterans' hospitals. She also created a "world doll collection" made up of donated dolls from across the globe – a popular attraction for children. Egermann used this collection to not only entertain but also as a way to teach children about the different cultures that each doll represented.<sup>49</sup>

Nichols Library was instrumental in creating another Naperville institution: Naper Settlement. In 1915 Egermann started a small museum in the library; a collection of local history-related items that included memorabilia donated by servicemen.<sup>50</sup> This museum was a popular draw, and in 1939, its five showcases were relocated to the Martin-Mitchell Museum, a precursor of Naper Settlement.<sup>51</sup>

The rapid growth of Naperville after the Second World War led to the expansion of the Naperville Public Libraries. The Nichols Library closed its doors on Washington Street in 1986. The library moved to a new, larger building located less than a mile away. The institution now operates three branches to accommodate the Naperville public. The library enjoys an excellent reputation and has received numerous awards in recent years.

The continued success of the Naperville Public Libraries is a testament to the legacy of James L. Nichols. The institution preserves and celebrates popular memory of the "Old Library Building." Installed in the foyer of the present-day Nichols Library is a miniature of the 1898 library's interior. Extremely detailed and accurate in scale, the miniature room is a fixture of the library's downtown branch. Many who have grown up in Naperville are familiar with it. The model transports the viewer back in time to the

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<sup>49</sup> Teague, "Naperville Public Libraries," 2-3; "More Dolls Added to Egermann Collection," *Naperville Clarion*, 23 October 1941.

<sup>50</sup> "Mary B. Egermann Retires After 41 Years As Librarian," *Naperville Sun*, 17 August 1950.

<sup>51</sup> Fraser, *Footsteps*, 27-28; Teague, "Naperville Public Libraries," 2.

original Nichols Library, illustrating the evolution of the library institution and the Naperville community over the last 119 years.

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## ADDITIONAL REASONS IN SUPPORT OF THE PROPOSED DESIGNATION

- I. As a building within the National Register of Historic Places district established in 1977, the old Nichols Library building qualifies for Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits. According to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA), the Tax Reform Act of 1986 provides a 20% federal income-tax credit for owners of income-producing, historic buildings that undergo substantial rehabilitations. The owner may subtract a credit equal to 20% of a rehabilitation's qualified expenditures from the owner's federal income taxes. Housed within the National Park Service (NPS), the Historic Preservation Tax Credit program is administered in Illinois by IHPA.

The benefits of the Historic Preservation Tax Credit are as follows:

- Helps close the financing gap between the cost of a rehabilitation project and the return on investment;
- Encourages the preservation of historic buildings through promotion, recognition, designation, and reuse;
- Increases the value of rehabilitated properties;
- Revitalizes downtowns and neighborhoods; and
- Reuses the built environment in a sustainable manner.<sup>52</sup>

The program benefits the owner, the occupants, and the community.

- II. The old Nichols Library building has historic importance to the City of Naperville. Preserving the building—and historic preservation in general—connects Naperville's citizens to people and places in our past and helps create a sense of place. Our heritage matters, and the old Nichols Library building

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<sup>52</sup> Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA), "Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits," <https://www2.illinois.gov/ihpa/Preserve/Pages/taxcredits.aspx>.

is a part of our heritage. As the first public library in Naperville, it's where generations went to acquire information and borrow what they wanted. James L. Nichols I, who donated the money to build this library, valued books and education. The building is iconic: to this day, Naperville residents say the old library building represents Naperville to them.

III. The current development proposal, unveiled at a public open house on May 16, 2017, does not fulfill the covenants and restrictions that run with the library property. These covenants and restrictions were set forth when the City of Naperville deeded the property to Truth Lutheran Church in 1996. According to the warranty deed dated March 14, 1996, these covenants and restrictions were to run with the land "for the benefit of the City of Naperville, its successors, assigns or agents." The covenants and restrictions state the following:

- 1) That current and future owners of the property "shall retain, protect and maintain in its present condition in perpetuity, the Washington Street facade of the original 'Old Library Building,' including the USGS bench mark in the northwest corner of the building in its present state."
- 2) That current and future owners of the property "shall further retain, protect and maintain in its present condition in perpetuity, the interior facade of the Washington Street entrance foyer of the original 'Old Library Building.'"<sup>53</sup>

According to the current owner, the proposed development would "tear down the old building brick by brick."<sup>54</sup> Tearing down and "reassembling"<sup>55</sup> the primary facade would constitute a violation of the

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<sup>53</sup> Warranty deed, City of Naperville to Truth Lutheran Church, 14 March 1996, DuPage County, Illinois, DuPage County Recorder, Wheaton.

<sup>54</sup> Marie Wilson, "Visions Differ for Future of Former Nichols Library in Naperville," *Daily Herald*, 17 May 2017, <http://www.dailyherald.com/news/20170517/visions-differ-for-future-of-former-nichols-library-in-naperville>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

aforementioned covenants and restrictions which clearly state that the Washington Street facade shall be protected and maintained in its *existing* condition.

Moreover, tearing down brick and stone which has been in place for over one hundred years will most likely result in its condition to deteriorate – again, a violation of the covenants and restrictions which call for protection and maintenance of the primary facade as is.

In summary, the proposed four-story mixed-use development fails to uphold these protections that safeguard the building “for the benefit of the City of Naperville.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Warranty deed, City of Naperville to Truth Lutheran Church.

### OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

On a Facebook page called “Downtown Naperville the Way it Used to Be” many residents—past and present—weighed in upon hearing that the old Nichols Library building was facing demolition. A sampling of some of their comments follow:

- I never, ever, thought Nichols Library would be the next victim. I believe a city can be progressive and historical!
- This library was intimate, friendly, and always there when we needed it. The Municipal band played just steps away all summer long, providing memories of the stars above, the blankets or folding chairs beneath you...and while listening to the band in front of you, the comfort of that sense of community always felt better because that small but reliable Nichols library was right nearby....It was the great Louis Sullivan who believed that a great building was more than just a structure....it is like a living breathing organism that should be protected because it brought life to its surroundings....Is the old Nichols Library just something out of River City Iowa and the Music Man?....sure, perhaps one can make that "progressive" argument. But there's an old saying that says in order to know where you are going...you need to first know where you've been. This building IS Naperville...it screams what we once were, and are still proud to be.
- I really hope some of you with bigger influence on this group can save the library. [H]istoric buildings must be preserved because without our history, we are nothing, and that's why we are all here in this group. To respect our history and what made us who we are.
- I worked at Nichols Library when I was in high school (71-75) and loved that building. It makes me sad to think of it being demolished in the name of "progress." Thanks to all who care and support its preservation.
- I lived in Naperville until I graduated and got married in 1957. Returned to Naperville in 1960 and then moved to Michigan in 1965. The Library was one of the places that I frequented a lot

while going to school. When I visit Naperville I always try to go there to reminisce. Would hate to see it torn down.

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Chicago Tribune  
New York Times

# PHOTOGRAPHS





*Primary Facade (2009)*



*Primary Facade (May 2017)*



*Main Entrance (May 2017)*



*North Half of Primary Facade (2009)*



*South Half of Primary Facade (2009)*



*North Facade (2009)*



*East Facade (2009)*

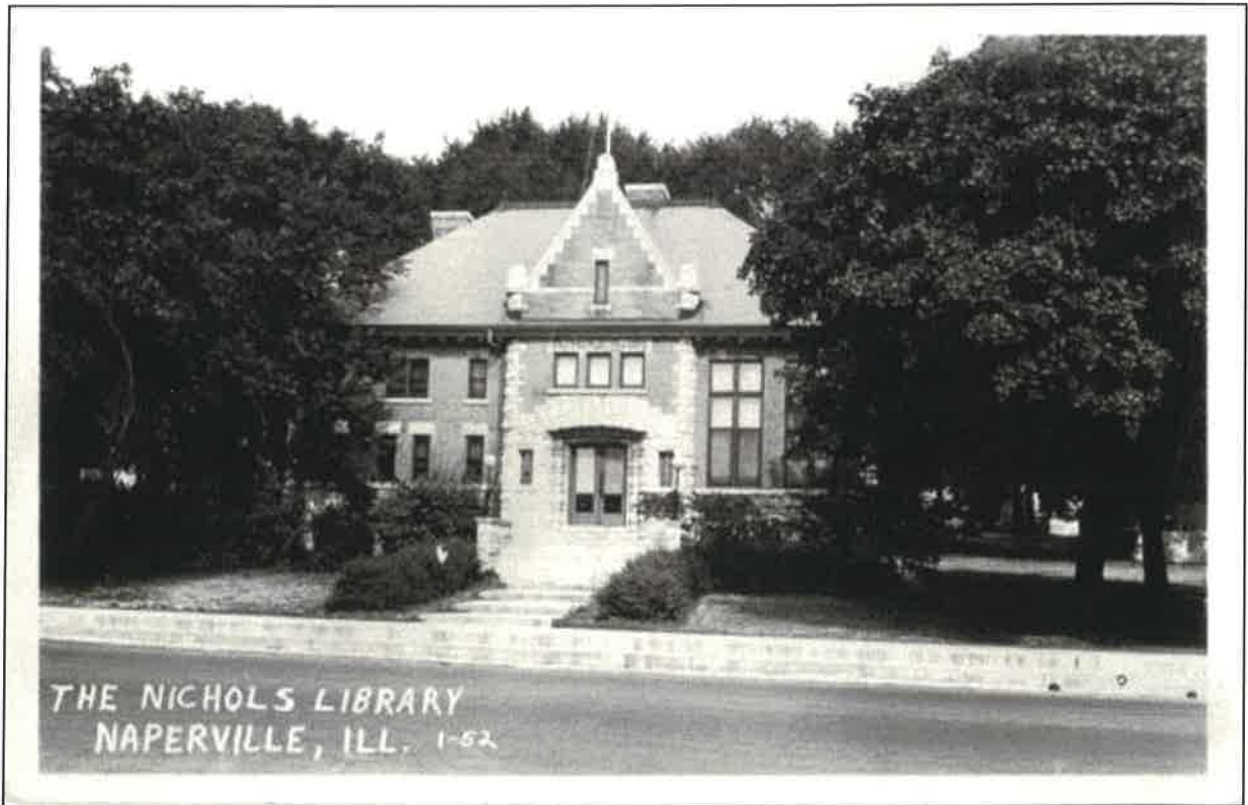


*South Facade (2009)*





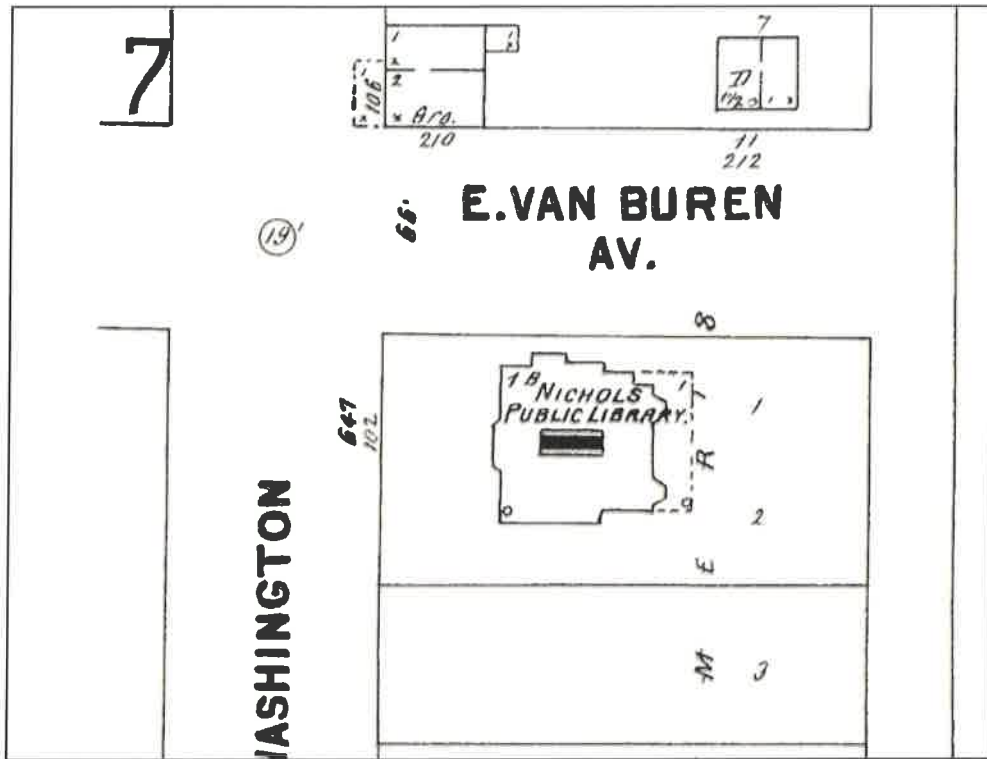
*Primary Facade (Postcard Photograph, n.d.)*



*Primary Facade (Postcard Photograph, n.d.)*



*East and North Facades Looking Southwest (n.d.)*



1898 SANBORN FIRE INSURANCE MAP

APPLICANT CONTACT INFORMATION:

Barbara Hower (Primary Contact)  
1855 Brookdale Rd.  
Naperville, IL 60563  
(630) 355-4071 (home)  
bhower@wowway.com

Charlie Wilkins  
605 N. Eagle St.  
Naperville, IL 60563  
(630) 853-8816 (mobile)  
cewilki4@gmail.com

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Lots 1, 2, 3, and the north 35 feet of Lot 4 in Block 4 of Hosmer's Addition to the Town of Naperville, being a subdivision of part of the east 1/2 of Section 13, Township 38 North, Range 9, East of the Third Principal Meridian, according to the Plat thereof recorded January 26, 1843 as Document 414, in DuPage County, Illinois, but specifically excluding therefrom all interest, if any, in and to the South half of Van Buren Avenue that is north of and adjacent to the above-described property.

COMMONLY KNOWN AS:

110 S. Washington St.  
Naperville, IL 60540

PARCEL IDs: 07-13-424-001; -002

OWNER INFORMATION:

Dwight Avram  
Great Central Properties  
1255 Bond St.  
Unit 111  
Naperville, IL 60563

# APPENDIX

**AFFIDAVIT**

RE: Owner Notification, Landmark Designation Application for the Old Nichols Library, 110 S. Washington Street

The undersigned, being first duly sworn on oath, deposes and says that the attached letter, marked Exhibit A and made a part hereof, has been, in accordance with the procedures of the City of Naperville, served by first class U.S. Postal mail, to the owner of the real property commonly known as 110 S. Washington Street in Naperville, Illinois.

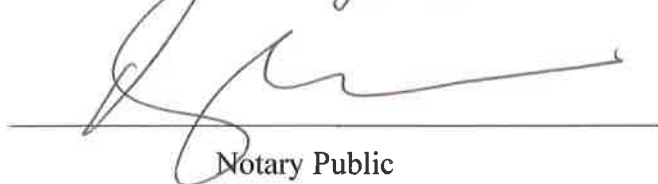
Further, this Affiant sayeth not.



By: Charlie Wilkins

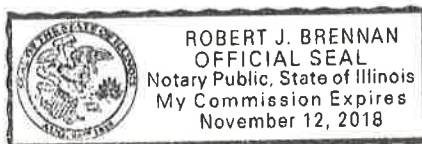
SUBSCRIBED and SWORN to before me

This 5<sup>th</sup> day of June, 20 17



Notary Public

[Affix Seal]



# Exhibit A

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Charlie Wilkins

605 North Eagle Street  
Naperville, IL 60563  
(630) 853-8816  
cewilki4@gmail.com

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June 5, 2017

Dwight Avram  
Great Central Properties  
1255 Bond St.  
Unit 111  
Naperville, IL 60563

Dear Mr. Avram,

This letter is to inform you that on June 5, 2017, an application for landmark designation of the property located at 110 S. Washington Street in Naperville, the original Nichols Library building, was filed with the City of Naperville Zoning Administrator. Per Section 6-11-3:1.4 of the City of Naperville Municipal Code, the Zoning Administrator shall mail to you a copy of the completed application.

Should you have any questions, you may contact me at the above listed phone number or email address.

Sincerely,



Charlie Wilkins



**AFFIDAVIT**

RE: Owner Consent for Landmark Designation of the Old Nichols Library, 110 S. Washington Street

The undersigned, being first duly sworn on oath, deposes and says that in accordance with the procedures of the City of Naperville, written documentation signed by the owner of the real property commonly as 110 S. Washington Street in Naperville, Illinois indicating consent to the application for landmark designation of the aforementioned property is unavailable because on May 16, 2017, said owner publicly made known plans to redevelop the subject property and demolish the Nichols Library building, an alteration that landmark designation strongly discourages (per the City of Naperville's Historic Building Design and Resource Manual) and that requires issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Historic Preservation Commission.

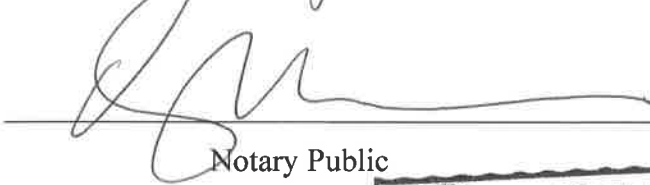
Further, this Affiant sayeth not.



By: Charlie Wilkins

SUBSCRIBED and SWORN to before me

This 5<sup>th</sup> day of June, 20 17

  
Notary Public

[Affix Seal]

