The Building of Carnegie Libraries in South Dakota

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My father, as I have stated, had been one of the five pioneers in Dunfermline who combined and gave access to their few books to their less fortunate neighbors. I had followed in his footsteps by giving my native town a library—its foundation stone laid by my mother—so that this public library was really my first gift.¹

In 1881, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie gave his hometown of Dunfermline, Scotland, money to build a library. This gift, in essence, began the Carnegie Library Building Program that ultimately contributed over \$56 million for more than twenty-five hundred library buildings in Great Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the West Indies, and the United States. The bulk of this money went to 1,679 libraries in the contiguous United States, beginning with the Allegheny, Pennsylvania, library in 1886. During World War I, material and manpower shortages halted the building program, but between 1901 and 1917, Carnegie had financed twentyfive buildings in South Dakota alone. After 1917, the philanthropist expanded his efforts into other areas of library assistance, improving training for librarians and increasing the size and quality of book collections. It is for his gift of library buildings, however, that Andrew Carnegie is primarily remembered.² In South Dakota, twenty-three examples of Carnegie Classic library architecture still survive.

1. Andrew Carnegie, Autobiography of Andrew Carnegie, Popular ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), p. 259.

2. Florence Anderson, Carnegie Corporation Library Program, 1911-1961 (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1963), pp. 4-7, 57; George S. Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development (Chicago: American Library Association, 1969), pp. 3, 13.

In his work Carnegie Libraries: Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development, George Bobinski emphasized the role Carnegie gifts played in furthering the development of the public library.³ Bobinski's interpretation certainly would have gained Andrew Carnegie's favor. The steelmaker saw himself as forming a partnership with communities to expand library service through his gifts. He provided the building; each community funded books, supplies, and staff salaries.⁴ Socially and architecturally, the twenty-five South Dakota buildings made an imprint upon individual towns and the state as a whole.

The twenty-five communities in South Dakota to receive Carnegie libraries garnered a total of \$254,000 (Table 1). Compared with eight states of similar population, South Dakota ranks second in number of libraries, behind Oregon (31), and third in total amount of money awarded, again behind Oregon (\$478,000) and Utah (\$255,470).5 In a six-state regional comparison (Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming), South Dakota ranked third in the number of libraries, with Iowa (101 for \$1,495,706) and Nebraska (69 for \$706,288) far ahead. It was fourth in the amount of money received—Wyoming got \$257,500 for sixteen buildings. Individual grant size in South Dakota ranged from \$5,000 for Dallas and Lake Andes to \$30,000 for Sioux Falls. Sioux Falls was also the first community to secure money from Carnegie, receiving its award on 24 January 1901, followed by Aberdeen on 14 March. Awards came steadily to South Dakota towns until 3 May 1917, when the last award was made to Wessington Springs.6

The process a community went through to receive a Carnegie library changed over the program's duration. Throughout the sixteen years of South Dakota's participation, Carnegie's staff refined the application process, placed more controls on each community, and increasingly participated in the architectural design of the buildings. Carnegie's focus on libraries grew out of his philosophy of giving. He believed that a gift was beneficial only if the recipient worked to better his lot as a result. He therefore structured his library pro-

^{3.} Bobinski's book is the seminal work on the subject. For an opposite view within a state context, see David I. Macleod's, *Carnegie Libraries in Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1968).

^{4.} Anderson, Carnegie Corporation Library Program, pp. 4-5.

^{5.} The eight states considered are Arizona, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Utah, and Vermont, using 1900 population figures.

^{6.} Durand R. Miller, comp., Carnegie Grants for Library Buildings, 1890-1917 (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1943), pp. 7, 21-40.

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TABLE 1
SOUTH DAKOTA CARNEGIE LIBRARIES
(in order of date awarded)

Library	Date Awarded	Amount
Sioux Falls	24 January 1901	\$30,000
Aberdeen	14 March 1901	15,000
Mitchell	10 January 1902	12,000
Redfield	14 March 1902	10,000
Yankton	14 March 1902	12,000
Deadwood	11 April 1902	15,000
Vermillion	20 February 1903	10,000
Pierre	20 March 1903	12,500
Watertown	13 April 1903	10,000
Canton	2 December 1904	10,000
Milbank	11 April 1905	7,000
Madison	16 January 1906	10,000
Hot Springs	9 March 1907	10,000
Brookings	13 December 1907	10,000
Huron	13 December 1907	10,000
Dell Rapids	20 November 1908	6,000
Lake Andes	21 November 1911	5,000
Dallas	28 April 1913	5,000
Armour	26 February 1914	7,500
Rapid City	11 March 1914	12,500
Britton	8 May 1914	7,500
Sisseton	11 June 1914	7,500
Wagner	1 June 1915	5,000
Tyndall	3 December 1915	7,500
Wessington Springs	3 May 1917	7,000

SOURCE Florence Anderson, Carnegie Corporation Library Program, 1911-1961 (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1963), p. 58; Durand R. Miller, comp., Carnegie Grants for Library Buildings, 1890-1917 (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1943), pp. 21-40.

gram to require a community to provide books and ongoing library service.⁷

A community desiring a library building simply wrote a letter to Carnegie, requesting money. James Bertram, Carnegie's personal secretary from 1894 to 1914 and the chief administrator of the program, answered the letter. Bertram sent the community a "Schedule of Questions" to complete and return. The questionnaire asked applicants for the town's population, a description of present library conditions, the amounts collected and pledged in community taxes

7. Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," North American Review 148 (June 1889): 663-64, and "The Best Fields for Philanthropy," North American Review 149 (Dec. 1889): 688-89.

for library support, an indication that a convenient site was available, and documentation of the amount of money in hand for a new building. Officially, the community provided the site and levied taxes to support the library at ten percent of the Carnegie gift per year, with a minimum of one thousand dollars in annual support. This meant that Sioux Falls, which received a grant of thirty thousand dollars, had to provide at least three thousand dollars a year in tax support for library maintenance. The mayor or city council had to pledge land and mill levy support; Carnegie did not accept documentation solely from the library board.⁸

Carnegie, through Bertram, considered certain factors when making awards. He refused state libraries and historical societies because he considered their resources to be sufficient without his aid. Communities with populations under one thousand were also not eligible because they lacked a viable tax base. The amount of money awarded depended upon population size, with two dollars per capita being the base figure and an additional allowance for projected

population growth.9

Some communities of adequate size failed to secure money. Other towns that were awarded money could not take advantage of their grant. South Dakota had four such communities: Howard, Miller, Parkston, and Tripp. Howard was promised \$7,500 but did not receive it because of "architectural problems," most likely an inability to agree with Bertram on building design. Miller, which could also have received \$7,500, wanted more funds, but had their request refused. Parkston (\$7,500) and Tripp (\$5,000) did not build with Carnegie money because they were unable to support a library at a rate of ten percent per year. Even Sioux Falls, which ultimately built a \$30,000 structure, hesitated in accepting its grant. In 1899, the city had been deeded the All Souls Church building at Twelfth Street and Dakota Avenue by W. H. and Winona Axtell Lyon. The existing library had just completed remodeling and settled into these new quarters when news of the Carnegie gift arrived, presenting the city council with an awkward situation. The Lyons, however, released the city from its obligations, took back the property, and cleared the way for Sioux Falls to build a new library.10

^{8.} Bobinski, *Carnegie Libraries*, pp. 38-40, 203-6. Carnegie was personally in charge of deposition of funds until 1910. In 1911, he created the Carnegie Corporation of New York to distribute the remainder of his assets.

^{9.} Ibid., pp. 45-46.

^{10.} Ibid., p. 135; R. E. Bragstad, Sioux Falls in Retrospect (Sioux Falls, S.Dak.: By the Author, 1967), pp. 61-62.

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In the early years, once a community had sent an acceptance back to James Bertram in New York, Carnegie's influence in the building process ended. He distributed the money in installments during the course of construction but exerted no pressure on the choosing of site, architect, or contractor. This period of relative local freedom lasted until 1908 when reports reached New York that communities needed advice on library design. Beginning that year, Bertram requested that he approve all plans before construction began—a tedious process that slowed building progress.¹¹ To speed it up, in 1911 Bertram issued a pamphlet entitled Notes on Library Bildings, which employed simplified spelling. "This memorandum," the pamphlet began, "is sent to anticipate frequent requests for such information, and should be taken as a guide, especially when the proposed architect has not had much library bilding experience. It should be noted that many of the bildings erected years ago, from plans tacitly permitted at the time, would not be allowed now."12

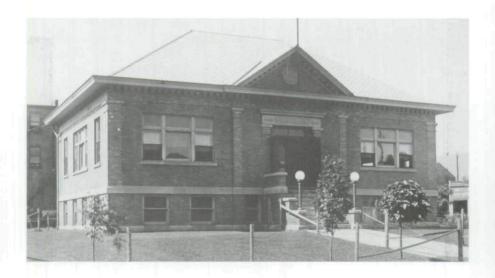
Notes on Library Bildings attempted to set minimum standards for Carnegie libraries. It advised local leaders to choose a plan that did not waste valuable main-floor space in a large entrance or in cloak rooms, toilets, and stairs. Bertram also discouraged fireplaces—real space wasters. "The bilding," he wrote, "should be devoted exclusively to: (main floor) housing of books and their issue for home use; comfortable accommodation for reading them by adults and children; (basement) lecture room; necessary accommodation for heating plant; also all conveniences for the library patrons and staff." Notes went on to recommend a simple rectangular plan with one story and a raised basement. The pamphlet included four sets of sample space plans.

The choice of an architect remained a purely local decision throughout the years of the program, and libraries enjoyed significant freedom in selecting a building's exterior design. Bertram explained that "no elevations ar given or suggestions made about the exteriors. These ar features in which the community and architect may express their individuality, keeping to a plain, dignified struc-

^{11.} Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries, p. 47.

^{12. &}quot;Note on Public Library Bildings," in A Manual of the Public Benefactions of Andrew Carnegie (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1919), p. 305. Bobinski cites the pamphlet as Notes on Library Bildings, and I have followed his usage. Carnegie was an advocate of the simplified spelling method, which Bertram adopted in his correspondence. All spelling peculiarities appear in the original.

^{13.} Ibid., p. 305.



The Canton Carnegie library (above), funded in 1904, and the Huron library (below), funded in 1907, were good examples of the one-story, raised-basement, rectangular plan for library buildings. The two buildings show a remarkable similarity. The Huron library building is no longer extant.



ture and not aiming at such exterior effects as may make impossible an effectiv and economical layout of the interior. 14 The one-story, raised-basement, rectangular plan did place natural limits on what an architect could do with the exterior. Furthermore, Bertram's comments seemed to affect architectural ornamentation—or lack thereof—on library buildings erected after 1911.

Of the twenty-five Carnegie buildings erected in South Dakota between 1901 and 1917, thirteen were constructed prior to Bertram's 1908 architectural review process, and fourteen were built before he published Notes on Library Bildings. When viewed as a group, all twenty-five are recognizable as small public libraries; they are one-story, usually rectangular buildings, with raised basements. All are extant except those in Aberdeen and Huron. Twelve are still in use as libraries, and the remaining eleven serve a variety of purposes. Those in Sisseton and Brookings are community centers. In Mitchell and Sioux Falls, they contain art museums, while those in Watertown and Milbank house county museums. A juvenile detention center occupies the Pierre building, and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts have their headquarters in the old Wagner library building. In Rapid City, Vermillion, and Yankton, business enterprises (a design firm, law office, and restaurant, respectively) have made use of the space at various times.

The architectural style of the twenty-five buildings is most often referred to as Carnegie Classic, a reference to both the person (Andrew Carnegie) who made them possible and the style (Classical) they most often emulate. Many of the pre-1908 South Dakota libraries are fine examples of Carnegie Classic: a rectangular, T-shaped or L-shaped plan, stone or brick structures with rusticated stone foundations, and low-pitched, hipped roofs. The facade is symmetrical with columns or pilasters supporting the pedimented entrance; these features give the buildings their Classical appearance.

The interiors of these early buildings approximated the floor plans Bertram distributed beginning in 1911. Steps, either outside or inside, often led the visitor to a central opening. The librarian's desk (today's circulation desk) occupied the center of the main floor, facing the entrance, with large rooms opening to either side. If T-shaped instead of rectangular, the plan usually had bookstacks directly behind the librarian's desk. State library organizations and national American Library Association publications had distributed this simple, balanced plan, and it had enjoyed wide use prior to Bertram's pamphlet. In addition, the few architectural firms specializing in

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library design also followed the form. Throughout the Midwest, Grant Miller and Normand Patton of Chicago designed over one hundred Carnegie libraries. In South Dakota, Joseph Schwartz of Sioux Falls designed the Sioux Falls, Vermillion, and Madison libraries. Here, as elsewhere, Bertram's suggested library floor plans merely grew out of accepted library and architectural interior design.¹⁵

The exterior style, although called Carnegie Classic, was not imposed by Andrew Carnegie, nor did he exert any discernible influence on its development. Bobinski asserted that Carnegie libraries ushered in the "beginning of modern library architecture," but the style resulted more from several other factors at work during the early twentieth century.16 The Classical Revival style gained popularity in architecture after the Columbia Exposition of 1893. Public buildings of all types—banks, courthouses, schools—began to exhibit Classical elements. The library, too, as a repository of knowledge and one of a community's educational resources, displayed the prevailing school architecture of the time. In form and function, the Carnegie library resembled the brick or stone school building. Architects and the community leaders employing them also borrowed much exterior ornamentation from previously completed library buildings. Through the geographical distribution of their designs, the few architectural firms specializing in Carnegie libraries helped to spread the style that came to be known as Carnegie Classic. Communities also borrowed ideas from each other. Lilly Borresen, the field librarian for the South Dakota Library Commission between 1913 and 1915, wrote to Leora Lewis, Rapid City librarian, recommending a plan she had seen elsewhere. "I wish," she said, "you might have one very much like the one in Two Harbors, Minn. I have the architect's plans, estimates, photographs of exterior and interior. Altogether, it is the most satisfactory library building of its size and cost that I have seen anywhere."17

^{15.} Charles C. Soule, *Library Rooms and Buildings* (Boston: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1902); *Small Libraries: A Collection of Plans Contributed by the League of Library Commissions* (Boston: American Library Association Publishing Board, 1908); Grant C. Miller, "Library Buildings," *Quarterly of the lowa Library Commission* 3 (Jan. 1903): 1-8; Paul Kruty, "Patton and Miller: Designers of Carnegie Libraries," *Palimpsest* 64 (July/Aug. 1983): 110; "Joseph Schwart(t)z, Sr.," Architects Notebook, South Dakota State Historical Preservation Center, Vermillion, S.Dak.

^{16.} Bobinski, Carnegie Libraries, p. 192.

^{17.} Lilly M. E. Borresen to Leora Lewis, 2 Nov. 1913, Rapid City Public Library, Rapid City, S.Dak. Borresen was a native of Two Harbors, Minnesota, and that may explain her preference for the town's library building.

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The Redfield Carnegie library, funded in 1902, displayed more expensive Classical elements, such as the dome and cupola.

The spread of the Carnegie Classic style did not prevent individual communities from exhibiting originality, even some eccentricity, in their choice of library buildings. Although such Classical features as domes or cupolas of varying sizes and styles were scorned by the American Library Association because of construction expense and an "undesirable effect upon interior arrangement," these forms adorned the Milbank, Mitchell, Pierre, Redfield, and Vermillion buildings. Exterior building materials also varied. Sioux Falls, Mitchell, and Dell Rapids, for example, chose Sioux quartzite for their libraries; Pierre selected a smooth-cut multihued local stone; and Hot Springs built with burnt orange sandstone.

Three of South Dakota's "Carnegies" presented truly unique appearances when viewed in context with the other twenty-two. Watertown's library, funded by Carnegie in 1903, was the only one to use a rectangular plan with corner entrance. Built of tan brick, it had a crenelated roof line, giving it the appearance of a modest castle. The Milbank library (1905) employed an L-shaped plan, not unusual to Carnegie library architecture, but certainly unique among South

^{18.} Small Libraries, p. 11. An early photograph of the Rapid City Carnegie Library shows a cupola that is now gone.



Early patrons (above) of the children's reading room of the Mitchell Carnegie library cluster around the front door of the Sioux quartzite building (below).

Dakota examples. Today, this library still bursts with architectural ornamentation: an intricate tile entrance floor, egg-and-dart pattern in the capital of the pilasters, a domed central section, Palladian windows, and a portico (facing the corner of the lot) reached on either side by a flight of stairs. Hot Springs (1913), the plainest of





The Carnegie library in Watertown, funded in 1903, displays a crenelated roof line, giving the appearance of a modest castle.

these three, was boxy in appearance, with a rectangular plan and flat roof. Constructed of burnt orange sandstone in alternately rough- and smooth-cut courses, it had only a star pattern in the upper light of the sash windows for ornamentation. Correspondence indicated Bertram significantly influenced the interior layout of this building.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the citizens of Hot Springs obtained an

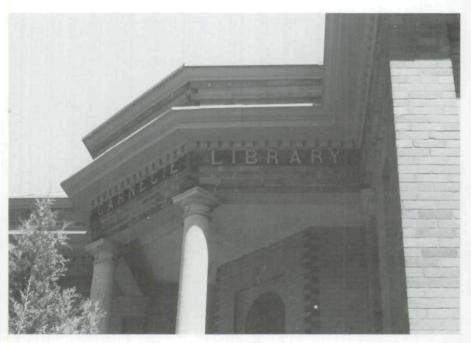
19. Carnegie Library Correspondence, "Hot Springs, South Dakota," microfilm reel no. 14, Carnegie Corporation, New York, N.Y.







Funded in 1905, the Milbank library, now the Grant County Museum, was the only South Dakota Carnegie to employ the L-shaped plan. Its richly decorated exterior featured a portico roof and egg-and-dart pattern in the capitals of the columns (below).

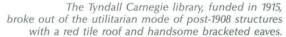


original exterior design that was architecturally sympathetic to other community buildings.

Watertown and Milbank library designs had predated Bertram's required architectural review, however. Beginning with Dell Rapids in 1909, marked differences appeared in the style of South Dakota Carnegie libraries. Plainer, with little architectural detail and much smaller entrances, all buildings were rectangular in design; T-shaped or L-shaped plans no longer appeared. Although Bertram stressed that decisions on exterior appearance rested with local officials, Bobinski asserted that Bertram was "deeply involved in architectural control." Such control yielded a definite lack of originality in the last twelve South Dakota structures. Only the Tyndall library, with its tile roof and bracketed eaves, broke out of the utilitarian mold.

In fairness to Bertram, it must be noted that architectural style itself underwent change during these years, and the dullness of design was most likely not entirely his doing. The Classical mode receded in popularity as architects reacted to the influences of the Prairie School, the Art Nouveau style, and the Arts and Crafts movement. Architecture became simpler and more streamlined, with emphasis on efficient use of space. Some of the "stripped down"

20. Bobinski, Carnegie Corporation, p. 63.





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Funded in 1902, the Deadwood Carnegie library continues to serve the enthusiastic Deadwood community that thronged to its formal opening in November 1905.

appearance of the last twelve buildings undoubtedly resulted from these new movements in the architectural community. Finally, most post-1908 awards came in smaller dollar amounts. The pre-1908 buildings averaged \$12,500 per award, while post-1908 buildings averaged \$7,500 each. Rapid City (1914) received \$12,500 for construction, while Brookings and Hot Springs got \$10,000 each. The other nine grants came through at \$7,500 or less (see Table 1). Fewer dollars meant fewer architectural details.

Viewed individually or as a group, South Dakota's Carnegie libraries are an important chapter in the architectural heritage of the state. But what contribution did the libraries make to each community? Deadwood, founded in 1876 during the Black Hills gold rush, had an active library in temporary quarters for twenty years before obtaining its "Carnegie." The November 1905 opening of the new library building—a grand event—attracted so many citizens that, "Doors, windows, nooks, aisles and every conceivable spot where one could stand was taken by someone anxious to see and hear the program."²¹

21. Deadwood Daily Pioneer, 8 Nov. 1905, quoted in "Deadwood Public Library," n.d., p. 3, Deadwood Public Library, Deadwood, S.Dak.

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For Dallas, the funding of the Carnegie library in 1913 signified the town's viability as a community on the frontier.

In April of 1913, the town of Dallas, South Dakota (population 1,277), received a library grant of \$5,000 from the Carnegie Corporation. The local paper captured the spirit of excitement and pride: "A library is one of the greatest pleasures and conveniences offered to the citizens. . . . Dallas is working for one end in view—namely, to build her city along the right lines and to build it so that she will be looked upon as a home community." Dallas had only been a viable community since 1907 when the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company extended its branch line service from Gregory. As a homestead registration point for the opening of Tripp and Mellette counties, the town's population swelled. Town boosters searched for respectability. The building of a library meant Dallas had met one more requirement of civilization. Along with the bank, the school, and the churches, a library signified that a town was there to stay.

Architecture reflects society and its values. The arrival of a library building, one paid for by multimillionaire Andrew Carnegie, sym-

^{22. &}quot;Library Building for Dallas," Gregory County News, 8 May 1913.

^{23.} Dallas, South Dakota: The End of the Line (Dallas, S.Dak.: Dallas Historical Society, n.d.), p. 2.

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bolized that a community considered reading and the pursuit of knowledge to be an important activity. All twenty-five South Dakota Carnegies reflected this emphasis through building sites located in the central, most active part of town-often in prime commercial space. Libraries at Brookings, Lake Andes, Madison, Pierre, and Sisseton occupied lots adjacent to the county courthouse. Those in Armour, Britton, Lake Andes, and Redfield fronted the main route through town. The remaining libraries bordered downtown business districts, often only half a block away. By locating the new building in such a prominent place, city leaders emphasized the library's worth.24

Finally, the architectural image conveyed by a Carnegie library became the image of libraries everywhere. The shape and form of the Carnegie is synonymous with library-an irony, given the fact that Carnegie himself directly influenced the style minimally if at all. His money facilitated the spread of the style, but it was the purpose of the building (one that stayed constant until the beginning of the multimedia era in the 1960s), the importance of learning in the communities, and the prevailing architectural forms of the period that dictated this style. Paul Goldberger, architecture critic for the New York Times, summed up Carnegie Classic buildings: "They were earnest in design and planning and are well crafted. They were built in the belief that the library is a special place in the community and should not look like another storefront."25 South Dakota's Carnegie libraries do not look like storefronts. Instead, they are unique community buildings.

As a group, the twenty-three remaining South Dakota structures present a microcosm of the Carnegie Library Building Program. Constructed during its most active years, they varied in size, presented a progression of designs, and reflected the influence of Bertram's architectural review as well as the national popularity of various architectural styles, prevailing library architecture, and local community desires. Together, these influences dictated the final appearance of each building. Once constructed, the Carnegie made both a social and architectural comment. It said that the residents believed in their town, in its permanence, and in the civilizing nature of a library. Architecturally, it represented a melding of function and design in the decades before World War I and became a "classic" statement of main street America.

24. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, Discovering the Vernacular Landscape (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 107. The library architectural guides of the time also emphasized locating the building near the downtown. See Miller, "Library Buildings," p. 2.

25. Quoted in Joseph Deitch, "Portrait: Paul Goldberger," Wilson Library Bulletin

(Jan. 1987): 55.

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