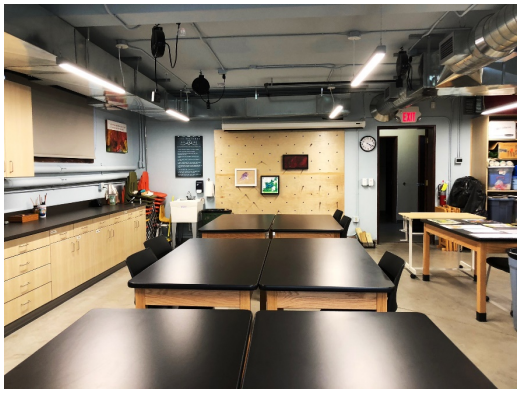
Mayor's Award for Historic Preservation
City of Brookings
"Excellence in Rehabilitation"
Carnegie Library

How can a former Carnegie Library meet the needs of an art space? Through rehabilitation. Contemporary demands for enclosing exhibit space and functioning art classrooms require environmental and technological systems that were not considered for buildings in the early twentieth century. The act of rehabilitation acknowledges the need to update historic properties without altering their historic characters. The recent rehabilitation of the Brookings Carnegie Library demonstrates excellence in meeting these standards, earning the rehabilitation a 2018 Mayor's Award in Excellence in Rehabilitation.

Completed in 1915, the Brookings Carnegie Library remains part of a typological legacy that defines library construction in small towns throughout the United States. Designed by G.C. Miller of Chicago, the Brookings Carnegie Library was one of the over one-hundred Carnegie Libraries Miller constructed throughout the Midwest. Miller specified a split-level, near-symmetrical plan with a central entry to be constructed out of brick and timber and capped with a hipped-roof covered in red tiles. Because the original building design was not a singular instance, but part of a Midwest library typology, the rehabilitation team committed to maintaining the building's status as a historic resource.



When the City of Brookings, the owners of the building, and the Brookings Arts Council, the current tenants of the building, identified the need to replace the failing boiler system and out-of-date electrical systems, the architects (JLG Architects – Brookings) and contractors (Visions Construction Group) in addition to the owners and tenants pushed for a roof to basement update of the entire building. The rehabilitation included, but was not limited to new limestone plaster, new rails for the artwork, new paint, LED daylight balance bulbs, new hardwood floors, and a new electrical and HVAC system. A few highlights of the work included the removal of all tiles from the roof and the use of a fire truck to identify leaks. Fourteen tiles were lost during the process, an astonishingly little amount. As is common in rehabilitation projects a few surprises arose. The discovery of windows behind the display wall on the west end of the gallery, opened the space and led to the implementation of daylight control through MechoShades as well as temporary art display partitions.

The end result was a cohesive interior space that could be climate controlled to better care for the art being made and exhibited in the building. As Heather Kuhlman, the executive director of the Brookings Art Council explains, “The collaboration among the city, the architect, the general contractor, and Brookings Arts Council led to a building footprint that did not change, but an overall configuration of the spaces that did.” The building can now be used for much more. This approach to rehabilitating a historic and cultural resource in Brookings is why the Brookings Carnegie Library is being recognized through the Mayor’s Award for Excellence in Rehabilitation.