ABSTRACT

THESIS: Pro Libris: Architectural Inscriptions and the University Library Building

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This study identifies and analyzes architectural inscriptions found on university and public libraries from the period of 1890 to 1930 in the United States. An architectural inscription refers to carved text, most often found adorning the walls of the interior or exterior of the building. The period of 1890 to 1930 saw the increased use of the inscription on a range of civic and institutional architecture. The era was particularly prone to moralizing and didactic sayings, which stemmed from a number of social and political factors. University libraries were drawn to the inscription as an ornamental type, for it became an expression of the ideals of the school and reflected a desire for legitimacy and sophistication. This study analyzes the decisions behind the inscriptive program, which often uncovers the latent agenda of the librarian, university president, or building committee. At the same time, the Beaux Arts and Neo-Gothic styles that were widely adopted for library buildings carried their own conventions for the aesthetic and associative use of the inscription. This study analyzes the historical and aesthetic factors that influenced university library inscriptions, and provides insight into the particular inscriptive themes found on number of American universities.