

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received JUL 23 1985  
date entered AUG 23 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Ansonia Library

and/or common Ansonia Library

**2. Location**

street & number 53 South Cliff Street

N.A. not for publication

city, town Ansonia

N.A. vicinity of

state Connecticut

code 09

county New Haven

code 009

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N.A.	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name The City of Ansonia

street & number City Hall, 253 Main Street

city, town Ansonia

N.A. vicinity of

state Connecticut 06401

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Town Clerk, City Hall

street & number 253 Main Street

city, town Ansonia

state Connecticut 06401

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1985  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street

city, town Hartford

state Connecticut

## 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Ansonia Library, built in 1892 in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, is a two-and-one-half-story, loadbearing brownstone building (82' x 70'; Photograph #1). It is located on a triangular site at the intersection of Cottage Avenue and South Cliff Street in a nineteenth-century residential neighborhood. The site is elevated over 200 feet above and to the east of the central business district of Ansonia and the Naugatuck River. Basically L-shaped in plan, with two gable-roofed sections set at ninety degrees to each other, the building is flanked by a square tower with a pyramidal roof at the northwest corner. The ridgeline of the roofs is not continuous, however, the south ridge being approximately six feet higher than the ridge to the north. Pinnacled gables rise above the roofline and are capped with a brownstone coping. The original windows, with multi-paned leaded casements, transoms, brownstone mullions and jambs, all remain in place. In 1960 a major gable-roofed, brick addition was added at the southeast corner (Photograph #5). Three stories in height, it repeats the massing and the form of the original wings.

Rock-faced, Long Meadow freestone (brownstone), laid in a random ashlar bond, is used on all the original exterior walls, which vary in thickness from 2 feet to 2 feet, 4 inches. The same material and pattern is found on the exposed foundation walls, set off by a pecked-and-chisel-dressed brownstone water table. The roof of the building and the tower originally were covered with unglazed Spanish tiles. They were removed in 1960 and replaced with a sheet-metal roof of copper, the only alteration to the building itself in its history.

The principal elevation faces South Cliff Street and contains the main entrance. It is recessed slightly off-center in a broad, round-arched opening of the Syrian type on the left side of the projecting pavilion formed by the extension of the west wing (Photograph #2,3). The large, double-leaf oak doors, which are currently painted black, have elaborate, scrolled, wrought-iron strapping which extends across the full width of each door (Photograph #6). To the right of the entrance is a band of square-headed windows. Above and across the gable are four trefoil-arched windows. The gable peak, faced with brownstone carved in a low relief pattern of squares and circles, contains a carved stone sculpture in high relief, recessed with a foil and circle. It depicts Minerva, the goddess of wisdom and knowledge (Photograph #4).

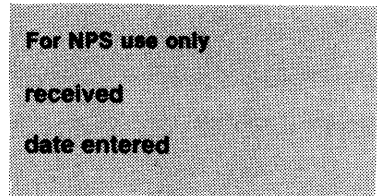
The south wing to the right of the entrance pavilion houses the main stacks of the library. The fenestration on the southwest elevation of this wing is confined to a continuous band of windows set under the eaves, four groups of three flat-headed leaded casements. At the gable end of this wing, a four-part, leaded window divided by horizontal stone mullions, is set above a smaller tripartite window at the first floor level. The north wing has a similar fenestration pattern, but it has a bay window on the rear (northeast) gable end (Photograph #5).

The stair tower displays large clock faces of decorative brownstone, with brass hands and numerals on three elevations. Its original mechanism has been electrified. The faces are flanked by colonettes at each corner and banded below by a decorative belt course of carved brownstone (Photograph #3). Slit windows of leaded glass, which provide light for the stairs, are surrounded by smooth brownstone set in a quoin-like pattern.

An unusual feature of the site is a large fountain, also built in 1892, located at the extreme northwest corner of the lot (Photograph #1). It consists of a polished granite  
(See continuation sheet.)

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column topped by a granite sphere, with a large granite watering trough. Originally the fountain was designed to provide water for people and horses; an inscription at the base contains a dedication to Anna Sewell, the author of Black Beauty. A paved sidewalk now separates the fountain from the roadway.

The interior of the building has remained virtually unchanged since 1892. The entrance foyer has a mosaic tile floor of the type found in late Roman villas. Designed by Walter Crane, the English illustrator, and installed by Burke and Company of New York and London, it has a pattern of interlocking circles with a classical design of Pegasus and Bellerophon in the center (Photograph #7). To the left, brownstone stairs lead up to the tower and down to the basement. Two round-arched openings, supported by consoles on either side and a column in the center, define the entrance to these stairs. Access to the reception area of the the main library is through a panelled oak door, which has nine, multi-paned, leaded glass inserts. The top tier is set in trefoil-arched openings. A similar door opens off the reception area to a small office (Photograph #8). To the right of the main desk are the original stacks. They are located in a barrel-vaulted room, two stories in height, with a balcony at the second level (Photographs #9,10). The oak book shelves have quarter-oak panels on either end. The vaulted ceiling has evenly spaced ribs and is panelled in narrow boards which run the the length of the room. The panelling is partially hidden by modern fluorescent light fixtures. On the southeast end wall, each set of the double tier of windows is recessed in a plastered, segmental-arched opening, an interior window treatment found throughout the building.

Behind the reception area to the northeast is the reading room, also in its virtually original condition. The high, sloping ceilings are also sheathed with narrow boards and are supported by carved, wooden braces that rest on carved, brownstone bases (Photograph # 11). Modern light fixtures have been installed on the ceiling. The long oak tables in this room, made for the library when it was built by Albert Entress, are still in use today. A tall fireplace, with brownstone surrounds and overmantel, is located in the southwest wall. Over the reception area is a second floor room, accessed from the stair tower and the balcony of the stacks. Originally used for the children's library, it now houses the historical collection. The room features a fireplace and an inglenook in the northwest wall. An unusual feature of the basement is the fireproof support system of tile-lined, shallow vaults that spring from brick piers.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Criteria B and C.

**Specific dates** 1892 **Builder/Architect** George Keller, Hartford (architect)  
August Budde and W. George Calder, Hartford (contractors)

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Ansonia Library is an exceptionally well-preserved, architecturally significant brownstone building, boldly conceived in the Richardsonian Romanesque-stylistic tradition. It is one of the best surviving examples of the work of George Keller, a renowned and prolific architect in Connecticut (Criterion C). The design is a skillful massing of simple geometric forms, cleanly elaborated with smooth and rusticated brownstone, and distinguished by many of the architectural details associated with Keller's designs: relief sculpture, parapeted gables, and leaded windows. The library also has considerable local historical importance because it was donated to the City of Ansonia by Caroline Phelps Stokes, as a memorial to her parents and her maternal grandfather Anson Greene Phelps (Criterion B). A leading nineteenth-century Connecticut industrialist, Phelps founded the Ansonia Brass and Copper Company, one of the forerunners of the American Brass Company, one of the nation's largest producers of copper alloys. His contribution to the city was recognized by renaming it Ansonia (a Latinization of his given name) in his honor in 1845.

### Architectural Significance:

George Keller (1843-1935) was a Hartford-based architect who had a major impact on the civic architecture of the city.<sup>1</sup> Best known for his Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch in Bushnell Park, he was also responsible for many public buildings. Unfortunately many of his major works, like the Hartford Public High School (1883, 1899), have been demolished. Still standing, however, is the Seyms Street Jail (1873), as well as a number of churches. He was also known as a designer of monuments, with projects ranging from major works like the Garfield Memorial in Cleveland and the monuments at Gettysburg and Antietam, to obelisks for wealthy private citizens.

Two libraries designed by Keller at the height of his career are considered to be his best work.<sup>2</sup> The first was built in the Queen Anne style at Norfolk, Connecticut, in 1888. In many ways, the Norfolk Library was a prelude to his latter design for the Ansonia Library. Although in the latter work he returned to the "round-arched Gothick," a style with which he was more familiar, the two buildings are quite similar in plan and interior detail. Often derivative, rarely an innovator, Keller continued to design in this mode long after it was fashionable to do so. He was a practicing architect for another forty years (until 1931), but his later career was eclipsed by less traditional architects who had begun to experiment with the Beaux-Arts style and later, the classical revivals of the early twentieth century.

Stylistically the Ansonia Library is clearly based on the Richardsonian Romanesque. To view Keller's work here only in terms of H. H. Richardson, however, does him a disservice. This building is a sophisticated amalgam of forms and design elements perfected by Keller over thirty years as an architect. However much he was influenced by Richardson, the Ansonia Library deserves to be judged on its own merits, as a mature expression of a distinguished artistic career.

(See continuation sheet.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

"Ansonia, Connecticut, Connecticut Tercentary Program, 1635-1935."

Archives of the Ansonia Library, Ansonia Connecticut.

Gillespie, C. B. Souvenir History of Ansonia, Connecticut: 1642-1880. Springfield, Mass.: Springfield Printing Company, 1880.

(See continuation sheet.)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property 0.5

Quadrangle name Ansonia

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	6	6	0	9	0	0	4	5	7	8	6	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The boundaries of the library property have not changed substantially since the building was constructed. The deed description is as follows: Commencing at a point on the Easterly side of the street now known as South Cliff Street 77.28 feet Northerly at the North Westerly corner of land (See continuation sheet.)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries N/A

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jan Cunningham, Preservation Consultant

Edited by John Herzan,  
National Register Coordinator

organization Cunningham Associates

date February 25, 1985

street & number 98 Washington Street

telephone (203) 347 4072

city or town Middletown

state Connecticut 06457

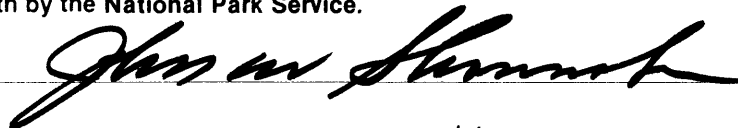
## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature




title Director:  
Connecticut Historical Commission

date July 2, 1985

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 8/23/85

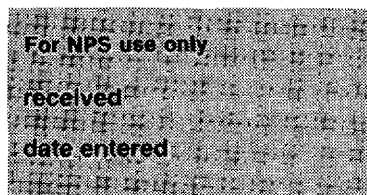
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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A simple but bold, asymmetrical massing of forms distinguish this building, and not incidentally give it an ecclesiastical appearance. Although not composed so effectively elsewhere in Keller's work, the broad, sweeping gabled roofs, the low stone walls, and the square tower often appeared, especially in his churches. The first building utilizing this composition was in fact a church, his first commission, designed in the Gothic Revival style in 1864.<sup>3</sup>

Surface texture and applied architectural detail are also associated with this architect. Figural relief sculpture, in particular, was a Keller trademark. Used to elaborate the gable of the facade of the library, it can be found on the frieze of many of his completed works, especially his monuments. In the library, however, he avoided the over-elaboration that characterized some of his earlier buildings, producing a much cleaner and well-integrated design. Not only is the rustication controlled, in keeping with the scale of the building, but it provides a background foil for the entrance archway, the relief sculpture, and the bands of windows.

More immediate connections can be found between his two nineteenth-century libraries, where Keller utilized many of the same features. They include the mosaic floor, leaded glass, tiled roof, and barrel vault. A favorite minor motif, the symbolic owl, first used in the Hartford Public High School, also appears in both buildings, in Ansonia, between the bosses of the interior capital in the foyer, and on the overmantel.

The ribbed, barrel-vaulted ceiling of the south wing of the Ansonia Library may be a direct borrowing from Richardson.<sup>4</sup> Even so, it was not the first time that Keller had relied on this form. It was used in several of his earlier buildings, including the Northam Memorial Chapel (1882), as well as in the original section of the Norfolk Library. This type of vault also appears in his later work. Keller added a wing with a barrel vault to the Norfolk Library in 1911, thereby recreating the floor plan and the organization of interior space that he had already perfected in Ansonia.

The 1960 addition, designed by O. C. S. Zircoli of Bridgeport, added 4,000 square feet to the building. Zircoli succeeded in incorporating an addition of this size without overwhelming the original library because of two factors. Despite its size, the simple form of the addition echoes the shape of the original wings. Furthermore, its location at the rear southeast corner took advantage of the the downslope of the property to minimize its size. The decision to build there, however, was probably dictated by a restriction in the deed of gift in 1896. Because the fountain had to remain in situ, expansion to the northwest, which would have seriously compromised the architectural integrity of the original building, was avoided. Less fortuitous was the removal of the tiles from the roof as part of this same renovation. The broad planes of the roof still predominate, but as can be seen from early photographs, the overall textural effect of the building has been somewhat diminished.

History:

Anson G. Phelps (1781-18530, was Ansonia's leading nineteenth-century citizen. A memorial library built to honor him and his family was certainly appropriate. One of the few merchant entrepreneurs who successfully made the transition to industrialist, Phelps was born at the end of the Revolution. Raised as an orphan in Simsbury, Connecticut, he married Olivia Egleston of Middletown and settled in Hartford. He was first engaged in the manufacture of saddles for the southern trade, with offices in the Phelps Building on

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North Main Street. By 1812 the company was so successful that he moved to New York and invested in the metal manufacturing business. Within a few years he founded Phelps, Dodge and Company of New York and Liverpool, England, and his own banking house in New York City. He also established copper and brass mills in Derby, Connecticut. Eventually he consolidated his Connecticut holdings in the Ansonia Brass and Copper Company. All of the company's buildings were eventually located on the east side of the Naugatuck River, in a section of Derby which was renamed Ansonia in 1845.<sup>5</sup> James B. Stokes, one of several sons-in-law who were partners and officers in his various enterprises, had married his daughter Carolina Phelps in 1838. Stokes served as the president of the Ansonia Brass Company for many years. By the end of the century, this company merged with several others to become the American Brass Company. Phelps was also instrumental in forming the Naugatuck Railway in 1848, connecting the town with New Haven and New York. He was one of the founders, with Henry Clay, Francis Scott Key, and others of the Colonization Society, the organization which established Liberia in Africa in 1822.

Caroline Phelps Stokes, the daughter of James B. and Carolina Stokes, lived most of her life in New York City, only spending her summers in Ansonia as a young girl. Her decision to donate a memorial library to the city was still very much in keeping with the grand tradition of late-nineteenth-century philanthropy. She purchased the site in 1890 with some of her inheritance from her father. Within a few months she had commissioned George Keller to design the building.<sup>6</sup> Construction, under the supervision of the architect, began in April of 1891. The building was completed and dedicated the following year.

The transfer of the building to the town, however, was delayed for four years. The building remained closed during this period, while Ansonians debated the merits of accepting a gift reported to be worth between \$60,000 and \$100,000. When first called upon to provide \$1500 a year for the maintenance of the building as a condition of the gift, the town had refused. The controversy received extensive coverage in the New York and Hartford papers. Although it was not publicized, control of the operation of the library was apparently a more critical issue, which was only resolved when local people were included on the Board of Directors along with members of the Phelps-Stokes family. Agreement was finally reached in April of 1896. A deed incorporating all the terms of the agreement was filed, and the library opened in August of that year.

Notes:

1. The author is indebted to David F. Ransom for his comprehensive survey of Keller's career, which made it possible to assess the significance of the library within this larger context. See Ransom, George Keller: Architect (Hartford: Stowe-Day Foundation, 1978).
2. Ransom, p. 191. A third library was built in Granville, Massachusetts (1902). also in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, but it is a much less successful work.
3. Although Keller was only 21 at the time, and just beginning his career with Batterson in Hartford, the attribution is persuasively documented by Ransom.
4. See the H. H. Richardson library in North Easton, Massachusetts (1879).

(See continuation sheet.)

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Notes (continued)

5. Ansonia, however, remained a borough of Derby until 1885 when it received its charter.
6. The memorial fountain may also have been designed by Keller. Miss Stokes believed it to be a fitting tribute to Anna Sewall, because the author had done so much to promote more humane treatment for horses with her book, Black Beauty.
7. A manuscript on Keller's letterhead, apparently in his own hand, itemized the total cost of construction. His total was approximately \$57,000. (The higher figures were quoted in the newspapers at the time.) Although he indicated the payee in most instances, for example Entress was paid for the library furniture, unfortunately the name of the sculptor, who received about \$2500 for his brownstone carving, was not listed. The manuscript is located in the "Historical File" of the Ansonia Library archives. This extensive file also contains photographs of the building under construction, newspaper clippings, typescripts of the dedication speeches, and several undated typescripts of library history.



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#9. (continued)

Orcutt, Samuel and Ambrose Beardsley. The History of the Old Town of Derby, Connecticut: 1642-1880. Springfield: The Springfield Printing Company, 1880.

Phelps, Judge Oliver Seymour, and Andrew T. Servin. The Phelps Family of America and Their English Ancestors. 2 vols. Pittsfield, Mass: Eagle Publishing Co., 1899.

Ransom, David F. George Keller: Architect. Hartford: Stowe-Day Foundation, 1978.

#10. (continued) of Abigail B. Downs, which point is designated on a map of the premises made by William B. Smith, C.E., by a letter "F"; thence running Northerly along the Easterly side of said street 159.02 feet to the point marked on said map by the letter "E"; thence deflecting to the right of the a circle of a radius of 4 feet and 10 inches to a point on the Westerly side of the highway known as Cottage Avenue, which point is marked on said map by the letter "A"; thence Southerly along the Westerly side of said Cottage Avenue 200.48 feet to a point on said map marked "B"; thence Westerly along the land of Frederick W. Gaylord 147.5 feet to the Easterly side of said South Cliff Street and point "F", being the commencement. The lines F-E and A-B would if continued to an intersection form an angle of 44 degrees. The lines A-B and B-F form an angle 52 degrees 36". and the lines B-F and F-E form an angle of 83 degrees 24 ", reserving from the above described premises the use of a passage way 10 feet in width along said South Cliff Street and said Cottage Avenue, which passage way is to be kept free and unobstructed for the mutual use of the grantee and said Frederick L. Gaylord, their heirs, successors and assigns forever.