

4800



AMSTERDAM FREE LIBRARY  
Name of Property  
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MONTGOMERY CO., NY  
County and State

**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

**1. Name of Property**

historic name AMSTERDAM FREE LIBRARY  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_  
multiple property listing N/A

**2. Location**

street & number 28 Church Street  not for publication  
city or town Amsterdam  vicinity  
state NY code 36 county Montgomery code 057 zip code 12010

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

R. Daniel Mackey 11/4/2019  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

PS/TPD  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

X entered in the National Register \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register  
\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register \_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain:)

Oliverio Obermuthy 12/23/2019  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
 (Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
 (Check only **one** box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

| Contributing | Noncontributing |              |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 1            | 0               | buildings    |
| 0            | 0               | sites        |
| 0            | 0               | structures   |
| 0            | 0               | objects      |
| 1            | 0               | <b>Total</b> |

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: Library

**Current Functions**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: Library

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS:

Beaux-Arts Classicism

**Materials**  
 (Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: STONE

walls: BRICK, STONE, TERRA COTTA

roof: ASPHALT

other: WOOD, GLASS, METAL

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## **Narrative Description**

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### **Summary Paragraph**

The Amsterdam Free Library is a Beaux Arts-style public building located at 28 Church Street in downtown Amsterdam, Montgomery County, New York. Amsterdam is a post-industrial city set in an otherwise rural area of the Mohawk Valley, between the Adirondack Mountains and the Appalachian Plateau. Centrally located in the downtown part of the city, which was once known as the “Carpet City” on account of its extensive carpet-manufacturing interests, the library has been an important part of community life since it opened in 1903. The Amsterdam Free Library has three sections, two of which are original: a 1902-03 two-story main section facing east on Church Street, a 1902-03 two-story west wing, and a 1980 one-story addition behind the west wing; the two original sections form a symmetrical T-shaped footprint. The façade of the principal section is distinguished by its rich Beaux-Arts Neoclassical features and is symmetrically composed. Four unfluted Composite-order columns, fashioned from Indiana limestone, and four rusticated buff-colored brick piers frame three large bays, the center of which contains the principal entrance, above which is the iconic inscription “OPEN TO ALL.” Tripartite windows with low segmental arches flank the central opening, with classically inspired terra cotta and wood details augmenting the decorative program; a deep entablature with denticulated cornice and a central segmental-arched pediment give way to a paneled parapet and low hipped roof. The interior of the library retains considerable physical integrity of plan and finishes to its 1903 opening. The main section retains its original oak wainscoting, high ceilings, large windows, built-in bookcases, fireplaces, and ornamental hardware. An enclosed entry lined with memorial plaques leads into a lobby, where a service desk is located; behind the desk is the original wood-paneled book lift that was once used to retrieve books from closed stacks in the basement and second floor of the west wing. The rest of the west wall was removed in 1980 to give patrons access to the stacks, restrooms, and seating located in both the west wing and 1980 addition. Two large reading rooms, the principal public spaces of the library, flank the enclosed entry, with brick fireplaces and busts of famous authors situated atop the built-in bookcases. A large enclosed staircase on the north leads to the second floor of the main section, where the library director has an enclosed office, but which otherwise consists of a large open area with stacks and a large room originally used for board of trustee meetings. In June 2017 the building suffered damage from a fire; damage from that event was contained to the front door and casing and second-story window, though associated smoke damage required cleaning and repainting of the entire second floor.

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**Location, Setting & Orientation**

The Amsterdam Free Library is located 930 feet north of the Mohawk River and faces Church Street, on the east bank of the North Chuctanunda Creek. After the American Revolution, the creek, which plunges almost 400 feet in a mile, became a locally important source of water power. The development of the Mohawk Turnpike (State Route 5) in 1809, the Erie Canal in the 1820s, and railroads on the north and south banks of the river beginning in the 1830s connected Amsterdam to markets on the East Coast and helped it become the “Carpet City.” The location of the Amsterdam Free Library, on the southwest corner of the intersection of Church and Livingston streets, places it in the center of this topographic context.

In 1902, when the Amsterdam Free Library was constructed, it backed onto the Montgomery Knitting Mills and Chuctanunda Street; these in turn bordered on and used the power of the North Chuctanunda Creek. Today, no mill buildings remain west of the library; Chuctanunda Street has been turned into an access road to the parking lot and the creek bank is a walking trail. South of the library on Church Street there is a parking lot, once a house site, and the 1935-36 Amsterdam Post Office (NRHP-listed 1988). North of the library, along Livingston Street (State Route 5), is the municipal Public Safety Building, constructed in 1974, where a former congressman’s home, warehouses, the city jail, and a knitting mill were once located.<sup>1</sup> Across Church Street is the United Presbyterian Church, an early twenty-first century building constructed after the destruction by fire of the congregation’s earlier 1869 Romanesque sanctuary in a 2000. To the east, all the houses that once lined Livingston Street have been removed, turning this stretch of road into an arterial. Northeast of the intersection of Church and Livingston streets is a short block with four late nineteenth century row houses, the Stephen Sanford Apartments, 37-43 Church Street; the rest of Church Street north of the library was once lined with high-style homes for many blocks. The Sanford Apartments and a few other homes – including the former Sanford Mansion, now Amsterdam City Hall (NRHP-listed, 2001) – are all that remain.

Church Street rises steadily from Market Street along the Mohawk River to the Sanford Mills at the top of the hill. The Amsterdam Free Library is built into the sloping grade of the hill with two stories on the north and an exposed basement story on the south.

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<sup>1</sup> Historic Amsterdam League, *Heart of Amsterdam* [tour booklet] (Amsterdam, NY: Historic Amsterdam League, May 2011), 10.

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**Exterior Description**

The Amsterdam Free Library was designed in the Beaux-Arts manner popular for Carnegie Libraries in the early twentieth century. It was designed by the Albany architectural office of Fuller & Pitcher and built by local contractor-builder P. Bernard Machold. The 1902-03 main section and the west wing have a basement; the 1980 addition does not. The east and north elevations are adorned with engaged columns; an entablature with detailed architrave, frieze and cornice; double-height windows; and decorative cartouches, scrolls, and foliate ornament. The exterior was erected with a variety of materials: the basement walls feature rough-hewn Hudson Valley bluestone laid up in ashlar, while the first- and second-story walls contrast buff-colored brick and Indiana limestone masonry in addition to terra cotta and wood. The roofs are hipped; they slope inwards on four sides and are flat topped. The roofs of the main block and west wing were originally covered with slate shingles but are now clad with asphalt shingles, as is the roof of the 1980 addition; the flat upper portion of all three are covered with EPDM membrane. Two tall brick chimneys flank the roof of the main section to the north and south.

Early photographs reveal that the main block's roof was once punctuated by two small oval-shaped windows of pressed-metal construction, located symmetrically and corresponding with the façade; they are no longer extant. In addition, metal cresting also embellished the hipped roof but has also since been removed.

**Facade (East Elevation)**

The façade of the library is divided into three recessed bays, which are defined by four rusticated brick piers that terminate below the cornice in molded cartouches and are further articulated by four Composite-order capitals that frame the two-story window openings. The rustication is carried from the piers across the bays and to the corners of the elevation. The center bay includes the elaborately detailed main entrance and a second-story tripartite window; the entrance is approached by a flight of concrete steps with associated railing. The piers and columns rise from a water table formed of dressed Indiana limestone, below which is the bluestone-walled basement, and they sustain a molded architrave, yellow-brick frieze, and denticulated cornice. The center section of the entablature, corresponding with the entrance bay, projects forward to create a center pavilion motif with corresponding segmental-arched pediment, in which a horizontal panel is located that carries the inscription "AMSTERDAM FREE LIBRARY." Above cornice line and extending behind the pediment is a yellow brick parapet with pressed-metal cornice and coping; it is paneled above the two outer bays.

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The main entrance and second-story tripartite window opening are, like the outer window bays, contained within a tall opening headed by low segmental arches. The associated architrave and central keystone motif are terra cotta, while the arch itself was formed of brick. The entrance has a molded wood architrave flanked by paneled pilasters that terminate in scrolled console brackets, which support a broken pediment with central molded anthemion. The tympanum below the pediment is filled with an oval cartouche inscribed "OPEN TO All" and is flanked by molded scroll work and foliate decoration. The second-story window opening above the entrance is of tripartite form with a large rectangular lower sash and smaller curved upper sash that follows the profile of the segmental-arched head. The brick arches are rusticated. The outer lower sash is hinged to open outward, the center sash is fixed, and the smaller flanking upper openings are fitted with inward-tilting hopper sash. The mullions that divide the lower sash were treated as paneled pilasters, while those above were treated as tapered and engaged colonettes.

The outer bays have the same terra cotta architrave that surrounds the center bay, and the same brick arches with central keystone motif. The first- and second-story tripartite windows were treated as a single vertical motif with a horizontal spandrel denoting the division between the first and second floors within. At first-story level there is a recessed brick panel situated between water table and sill-level. All windows are hung with single-pane wood sash.

### **North Elevation**

All three blocks of the library – the two-story main section, the two-story west wing, and the 1980 one-story addition – are visible on the north elevation, which parallels Livingston Street. The north elevation of the main section features many of the decorative devices employed on the façade, excepting the monumental columns, and is slightly narrower. It has three recessed bays articulated by four brick piers, the rustication of which is carried onto the adjacent wall planes. The two most easterly bays have tall paired windows at first- and second-story level, divided by a horizontal spandrel panel, and the most westerly bay has an entrance door located at grade. Above the door is a wooden spandrel panel that separates it from the remaining expanse of window above, which illuminates a stair within (the door was in the original 1902 plans but was not built immediately; it was added in 1917, requiring modifications to the window in the remaining area of bay above).

The two-story west wing is lower than the two-story main section and is four bays deep. Each bay has a double-hung window with stone sill with segmental-arched head at both first- and second-story level; there are,

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in addition, four basement windows with clear plastic well covers. An access ramp to the 1980 addition passes in front of the wing. The 1980 addition is one-story with brick laid in running bond and is six bays deep. There is a metal door with glazed upper panel in the third bay and double-hung windows with segmental-arched heads in the remaining bays.

### **West Elevation**

The west elevation is principally composed of the one-story 1980 addition. A projecting bay window with twelve vertically oriented panes spans the center of the elevation; it is supported by five brick buttresses. The addition is largely utilitarian in conception and is terminated by a simple cornice. Above the cornice line, the hipped roofs of the addition, along with that of the west wing and main section, are visible; the 1902 roofs are steeper than that of the addition. One window and one door at the back of the 1902 main section are part of an accessible entrance on the south elevation.

### **South Elevation**

The south elevation lacks the robust Neoclassical ornamentation employed on the east and north elevations, although the fenestration is similar. When built, this elevation was largely blocked by an adjacent building, and thus the more straightforward treatment. In addition, the sloping topography of the site building required that more of the basement be exposed when compared with the opposite elevation. As a result, the main section has three paired windows corresponding with the first and second floors within, below which are basement windows aligned in the same vertical plane; there is no side door as on the north. An accessible entrance was added to the back of the main section in 2002; this adapted an existing window and basement entrance to provide access to the elevator from the parking lot while doing minimum damage to integrity.

The four bays of the west wing have segmental-arched double-hung windows at first and second-story level and two basement windows in the middle bays. The original basement window in one of the outer bays has been replaced with a solid panel and an electric utility box; the other was also incorporated into the accessible entrance as an additional door. A shed roof projects from the back of the main building to shield this entrance. The balance of the elevation is given over to the six bays of the 1980 addition; each bay has a double-hung window in an a segmental-arched opening with a stone sill.

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### **Interior**

The interior of the main section and the west wing of the library remain much as they were when the library was constructed in 1902. Three main changes have followed the completion of the 1980 addition: the area behind the main desk was opened up; the stair to the second floor of the main section of the library was modified; and the cataloguer's room and the office of the librarian were combined.

Both the first and second floors and the basement are used presently for programming. An elevator provides access to all three levels for patrons, while a dumbwaiter for books connects the basement and first floor. Most of the rooms retain their original ornamentation, including oak trim, high plaster ceilings and walls, tall wood doors, molded ceiling trim, interior arches, column supports, and arched wood windows.

The first floor of the original 1902 building contains the vestibule (accessed via the principal entrance), lobby and circulation desk, adult reading rooms, librarian's office, and stairs to the second floor and basement. The 1980 addition contains rest rooms, stacks, and additional seating. Unless otherwise noted, the walls of the 1902 main section and west wing are wallpapered above wood wainscoting; the ceilings are plastered with decorative plaster coves; and rooms are heated with ornate, early twentieth century, hot-water radiators.

The vestibule serves as the formal point of entry to the library and was intended to impress and to pay tribute to three benefactors who brought it into existence. It consists of two levels, with three pink marble steps between two sections of white hexagonal-shaped tile flooring; each section is roughly square in plan and bordered with a Greek key design in contrasting red square tiles. On each side of the upper level there is a radiator. The side walls are painted plaster, with wood wainscot and a marble baseboard below. Three large plaster frames accent each side wall above the wainscot. The three on the north have fiber-covered bulletin boards; the three on the south have metal plaques mounted on wood. The plaques were installed in February 2004 to celebrate the centennial of the Amsterdam Union Library, and each is dedicated to an individual who helped make Amsterdam's dream of a free public library a reality. Andrew Carnegie provided most of the funds for the library; Dr. William H. Robb was the first president of the board of trustees, before the library was built; and the board treasurer willed much of his estate to the library when he died in June 1895. The plaques read as follows: "In Honor of Andrew Carnegie the Generous Donor of the Funds for this Building;" "In Memory of William H. Robb M.D. One of the founders and benefactors and the first president of the Amsterdam Free Library;" and



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“In Memory of David Cady who first permanently endowed the Amsterdam library.” The entrance into the lobby consists of a wood-paneled double-leaf door and glass transom fit into an arched opening. Each leaf of the door has glazing in the upper half.

The vestibule opens into a small lobby beyond which is the circulation desk, located in a space defined in the original architectural plan as the “delivery hall.” The distinction between those two areas was historically important and will be further considered in Section 8; however, in the current context, the two areas now function as one. That part of the building accommodates the circulation desk and acts as the principal axis of the library. The lobby opens to reading rooms on the north and south, while the delivery hall provides access to the main staircase (north), the librarian’s office (south), and stacks located in the 1980 addition (west); each of these portals is defined by an arch. The arch from the vestibule and the arch to the librarian’s office are slightly recessed.

The circulation desk is roughly rectangular in shape and has clipped corners. There are seven wood panels across the front, one in the corners, and two on the sides; the wood writing surface is protected by glass. Behind the desk are three arches: that on the south leads to the west wing and 1980 addition; that in the center is contained entirely behind the desk; while that on the north was closed off in 1980 and now houses simple displays—it is labelled the “Wall of Honor.” The dumbwaiter that conveyed books to patrons from the basement stacks remains operable and can be seen through the center arch. Portraits of three library leaders—two oils and one photograph – are hung over the arches. From left to right, these portraits are Dr. Salphronius French, the second library president; Charles French, the third president; and Dr. William Robb, the first president.

The north and south reading rooms are similar; the north one remains largely as built, while the one on the south has become a computer room with some of its original elements being presently obscured. Each room has a fireplace in mottled brown brick with a marble mantelpiece and brick hearth. The windows – tripartite on the façade, paired on the sides – reach to the plaster ceilings with built-in benches below. Most of the wall area in each room is covered by tall built-in wooden bookcases; those have wainscot backs, with plaster busts and copies of famous statuary displayed on top. Original lighting fixtures have been replaced. The south reading room has an additional entrance – a single door with glass sidelights and transom in an arched opening; it originally accessed the librarian’s office but is blocked on the inside.

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When the library was built, the librarian's room was situated behind the cataloguer's room, on the south side of the delivery hall. Although connected, each room had its own entrance – the librarian's room from the south reading room and the cataloguer's room from the delivery hall. An internal partition between those two rooms was removed to create the current librarian's office. A row of built-in wood cabinets used by the cataloguer remains in the front part of the room. However, the office lacks wainscoting and the original ceiling has been obscured by a later dropped ceiling.

On the north side of the delivery hall is an enclosed stairway that leads up to the children's department on the second floor, outside to Livingston Street, and down to the basement. The external door is shown in the original plans but was not added until 1917. The arch to the stair is closed with a wainscoted partition and glazed and paneled door. The oak newel posts are square; the wainscoted balustrade is solid below the wood handrailing. At the top of the stairway is a single door that leads into the trustee's meeting room and a ladder to the attic and roof; there is also a short hall leading west to a small bathroom, located in the second floor of the west wing.

The west wing originally contained closed library stacks and a stair to additional stacks situated on the second floor; access to it was controlled by the librarian at the circulation desk. The stacks are now open to the public and the area is accessed through the open archway south of the circulation desk. In 2016, the center of the west wing – now called the “reading lounge” – was opened up to allow for expanded programming space. In addition, there are two bathrooms and an additional office on the north side of the plan, a closet and an elevator behind the closed north arch of the delivery hall, and a kitchen and inaccessible interior staircase on the south. The most notable feature of the west wing is the wood-paneled dumbwaiter/book lift situated behind the circulation desk.

The balance of the first-floor plan consists of the 1980 addition, which contains open stacks with seating next to the large bay window that spans the center of the west wall; ten of the twelve casement windows that compose the bay are operable. A metal door on the north provides accessible access; however, getting to this door is difficult because of the slope of Church Street. A second accessible entrance has been built off the parking lot on the south side of the building and into the basement.

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The second floor is divided into three spaces – two rooms used for children’s programming in the main section and a community room in the second floor of the west wing. That part of the library suffered smoke damage during the 2017 fire and was repainted and its floors refinished in 2018. It is accessed by elevator or from the enclosed stairway located on the north side of the building; the wood paneled double-leaf door from the stair has glazed upper panels and a square glazed transom above. Another opening leads to the community room in second floor of the west wing. Walls are plaster with plain plaster ceilings.

Most of the second-floor plan is given over to the children’s reading room; it contains a circulation desk, stacks, seating, and open areas for children’s programs. The oak kneehole desk is rectangular with panels to the floor on three sides; it situated in the middle of the room near the stairway door to control traffic. The stacks are arrayed around the room to create smaller semi-private areas with child-sized desks, chairs, tables, and sofas. The space is lit by fluorescent lights and the top six feet of the windows on the façade and side elevations. As a result, it is exceptionally bright.

The north quarter of the second floor can be closed off for private meetings; when built, it was the meeting room for the library board. It also contains a brown mottled-brick fireplace and built-in bookcases against the walls; the remaining wall area is given over to ornate, early twentieth century, hot-water radiators. The most striking feature of this room is the pair of broad roll-top doors that separate it from the rest of the second floor. Those doors lift into the ceiling and still retain their historic hardware. A single paneled door from the enclosed stairway allowed the trustees private access to the room when the roll-top doors were closed.

A portion of the second floor of the west wing initially held stacks but now functions as a community room. There was a door in the back wall of the children’s reading room and stairs from the first floor, behind the first-floor circulation desk, but the area was not generally accessible to library patrons. Architect William E. Cooper’s 1979 blueprints for the 1980 addition depict those changes required to convert it into a community room, now known as the Robin Kappler Room. The elevator replaced the original door from the reading room; a double-leaf door with three steps was added; and the first-floor stairs were removed. In addition, a skylight illuminating the first-floor circulation desk was removed. What remains is an open room with stacks at the rear, windows on the north and south sides, and access to the children’s reading room and a secondary staircase on the south side of the building, which was added in 1980 when the function of the room changed. The bathroom at the top of the enclosed stair is actually in the second floor of the west wing and takes a corner out of the

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community room.

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The basement now houses a variety of functions, including utilities, storage, book sales, a large workroom, a former bathroom (now used for storage), elevator, and recycling room with its own exit. Because the library is built into the sloping grade of the site, public access is through an entrance—redesigned for accessibility in 1980—located on the south side of the building leading to the parking lot, as well as enclosed stairs on the north and south sides. The north stairs are a continuation of the main stairs from the delivery hall and have oak newel posts and a closed wainscoted balustrade; the south stairs were added in 1980 when the second floor of the west wing was converted into a community room. The basement was not designed originally for public use; although the entrances to most rooms are slightly arched, there are few decorative touches and the floor is concrete.

The north stairs open into a central hall now filled with bookcases and often used for book sales. All other rooms open off this space, which also includes the elevator to the first and second floors. Before 2016, the present workroom in the southeast corner of the plan held book stacks and was used for general storage; before that, it may have been a room for library staff to repair or process books. It is now a multifunction and flexible workroom/ classroom space. Wide built-in wooden shelves line the west wall, and the center of the room is filled with tables. Walls are painted masonry, and light comes from florescent fixtures and large basement windows on the east and south. There may once have been an interior partition, given the presence of a support column that supports a beam under the south reading room.

When built, the library used a coal boiler for heat, requiring a dedicated boiler room and coal cellar in the northeast corner of the library basement. Heat is currently provided by a natural gas unit installed in 2015 and vented through the north chimney. A door on the inner east wall leads to the coal cellar, now used for storage of books and other materials. At the center of the basement, under the entry vestibule, is a small room used to store books; it contains a door to a maintenance closet against the east wall. There are no windows in either room. Blueprints from 1979 suggest that the inner room may once have been a photographic dark room.

Under the north stairs is a single bathroom, no longer operable and currently used for storage. The presence of this bathroom suggests that the basement was used extensively by staff when built. Additional storage areas for library materials and books are located along the north and west sides of the center hall. A vestibule with wide

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doors is located to the south of the center hall in the southwest corner of the main building and used to store recyclables, garbage cans, and lawn tools.

### **Integrity**

The Amsterdam Free Library is an excellent example of an early twentieth century Carnegie library, designed by Albany architect Albert Fuller and built by local contractor P. Bernard Machold. It was reconfigured in 1980 with a new addition and conversion of the second floor of the west wing to a community meeting room; however, all other spaces were left relatively unchanged. As a result, the library retains excellent physical integrity to the time of its completion. The 2017 fire has required restoration of the front door and upper window; otherwise, the building has excellent integrity of materials and workmanship.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance in the last 50 years

**Period of Significance (justification):**

The cited period of significance, 1902-1969, begins with the construction of the library and terminates at the 50-year cutoff, given its continued use in its intended and historic capacity.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

N/A

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

**EDUCATION**

**ARCHITECTURE**

**Period of Significance**

1902 - 1969

**Significant Dates**

1902-03 (construction/official opening)

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Fuller, Albert W. (architect); William B. Pitcher (architect); P. Bernard Machold (builder)

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### **Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Amsterdam Free Library is an architecturally and historically significant resource located in the City of Amsterdam, Montgomery County, New York. The nominated building is significant in association with NRHP Criterion A, in the area of Education, given its 150 years of service as a free library serving the Amsterdam community, and additionally under NRHP Criterion C, in the area of Architecture, as an excellent representative example of a Carnegie Library designed by the Albany architectural office of Fuller & Pitcher in the Neoclassical Beaux-Arts taste. The library was constructed during a period of prosperity in Amsterdam's history. The city came to be known as the "Carpet City" for its nationally known Mohawk Carpet and Bigelow Sanford mills; the growth associated with its industrial success in turn triggered a surge in population and the need for a larger library that could help the citizens of Amsterdam improve their circumstances. In 1902, Dr. Salphronius French, second president of the Amsterdam Library Association, wrote Andrew Carnegie requesting grant funding for the purpose of constructing a new library for the city. The grant was approved in February of that year, with the requirement that the library association purchase the site and the city government approve a yearly stipend for its operation. The following month local citizens voted to accept the grant and, several weeks later, the city council accepted the terms. On October 21, 1902, the cornerstone for the new edifice was laid with Masonic ceremonies, and the new library was completed and opened to the public on November 2, 1903. Albany architects Albert W. Fuller (1854-1934) and his partner, William B. Pitcher (1864 – 1921), designed the building, which was erected by Amsterdam contractor-builder P. Bernard Machold. It remains a building of considerable architectural and historic importance to the City of Amsterdam and one which continues to fulfill the original purpose for which it was conceived and erected.

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Developmental history/additional historic context information

### **Historical Context**

The Amsterdam area was largely unsettled before the American Revolution due to disputed land claims, steep hills, and poor soils. After the war, the land claims were resolved, and the geography of the area became an asset to industrialization. Albert Vedder built a grist mill near the mouth of the North Chuctanunda Creek in 1785. A saw mill, blacksmith and church had followed by 1800. Initially, the hamlet was called Veddersburg, but the name was soon changed to Amsterdam. In 1813, a church and 25 dwellings housed 150 inhabitants; by

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1825, there were 45 dwellings and 300 inhabitants. The community incorporated as a village in 1831 and became a city in 1884, with John Carmichael serving as the first mayor.<sup>2</sup> During the course of the nineteenth century, industries and mills were purchased and sold many times over, and companies were formed and dissolved in the storms of capitalism. By the early twentieth century, Amsterdam was the seventh largest industrial city in New York State; the second largest in the world in the manufacture of carpets and rugs; and the first in the world in the manufacture of brooms. More than 10,000 men and women were on the payroll of 62 important mill interests. These mills produced carpets and rugs, underwear, silk products, gloves, linseed oil, brooms, and pearl buttons. Others made chemicals, sweaters, shirts, sport coats, jackets, soft drinks, malt beverages, paper box machinery, hosiery, needles, paint, paper boxes, wardrobes, tin-ware, and basketballs, footballs and beach balls.<sup>3</sup>

Population data documents the growth of the community. Amsterdam did not exist at the time of the first federal census in 1790; however, between 1800 and 1860, when census data included both the town and village of Amsterdam, the town's population grew from 1,064 to 4,557. In 1870 and 1880, figures for the town and village were reported separately; the village population was 5,426 in 1870 and 9,466 in 1880. After the city incorporated, growth increased dramatically. In 1890, there were 17,336 inhabitants; in 1900, 20,927; in 1910, 31,267; in 1920, 33,524; and in 1930, 34,817. The greatest growth occurred between 1900 and 1910, as local industry flourished. The city and town population reported its all time high, 38,635, in 1930.

The North Chuctanunda Creek is immediately west of the Amsterdam Free Library and flows into the Mohawk River just south of the library; at the time the library was built, industries were still clustered nearby, along the creek. Most prominent among them were the carpet factories of Sanford and Sons and Mohawk Carpets. In the early 1840s, carpet manufacturer John Sanford recalled his son Stephen from West Point and put him to work in his mill. Stephen became the most influential leader in the industrial development of Amsterdam and became deeply invested in the life and interests of the community. Mohawk Carpets was formed when McCleary, Wallin, and Crouse joined the Shuttleworth brothers in 1920. Herbert L. Shuttleworth II, grandson of the 1878 company founder, became chairman of the board in 1952 and was called Amsterdam's number one citizen.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hugh P. Donlon, *Amsterdam New York Annals of a Mill Town* (1980), 9-11

<sup>3</sup> Manning's Amsterdam Directory, October 1936, vol. XXXV (Schenectady, NY), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Obituary of Herbert L. Shuttleworth II, *Daily Gazette*, September 13, 2010.



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Manufacturing made many a number of Amsterdam citizens into millionaires, but many businesses also failed, pushing workers into financial stress. Amsterdam had eighteen industrial bankruptcies during the financial panic of 1893, on account of which S. Sanford and Sons closed its carpet mill from the first day of August 1893 until early 1894. Later that year, Sanford workers went on strike after a wage cut. The Knights of Labor unsuccessfully tried to organize Amsterdam mill hands in 1896. Mill owners had united and refused to negotiate; physical clashes were frequent and police were often involved. Pay in textile factories was nine dollars a week for twelve-hour days. A 1920 strike at the Kayser-Silk Mill on Elk Street lasted ten months; the mill closed in 1924. A strike at the Shuttleworth Carpet Company in 1921 lasted eight months.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Amsterdam – like many industrial cities in New York State – was facing challenges related to the rapid expansion of its manufacturing interests. Industrial growth led to the arrival of thousands of rural American workers and additional Irish, Italian, French Canadian, and Eastern European immigrants; the city’s population increased by 50 percent in ten years. City leaders and mill owners were concerned about the best ways to integrate new citizens into the existing community. Education was viewed as critical, leading to an increase in public elementary and high schools in newly built parts of the city. Libraries were also seen as an important component of public education.

### **The Free Library Movement**

Before the Civil War, circulation libraries did not exist or were otherwise limited to subscribers. In 1859, the Boston Athenaeum opened the wealthiest subscription library in the country; however, most communities remained unserved.<sup>5</sup> As a result, generally only wealthier citizens had access to books. However, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of free public libraries, available to every citizen, grew in popularity. Free public libraries were supported by taxes, governed by boards, were open to all, were established by state laws, and provided services without charge. Peterborough, New Hampshire, believes that its 1834 library was the first free public library in the United States, but the 1848 Boston Public Library is generally given that credit.<sup>6</sup>

The professionalization of library services, the expansion of personal and corporate philanthropy, women’s voluntary associations, and the passing of library laws were other key factors that encouraged an increase in

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<sup>5</sup> Boston Athenaeum website, [www.bostonathenaeum.org](http://www.bostonathenaeum.org), accessed 14 April 2018.

<sup>6</sup> <https://dp.la/exhibitions/history-us-public-libraries/beginnings/first-public-libraries>, accessed 13 August 2019.

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American public libraries.<sup>7</sup> In New York State, the actions of Melvil Dewey were key. He professionalized librarianship by founding the Library Bureau to create standardize library equipment, inventing the Dewey Decimal System to catalogue books, and organizing the American Library Association with others – all in 1876. In 1884, while librarian of Columbia University, Dewey persuaded its trustees to approve the first college training for librarians; that program did not last long, due to the inclusion of women in the inaugural class. However, by 1888, he had moved to Albany to become director of the New York State Library and he reestablished college training there. Dewey became secretary of the University of the State of New York and espoused the goal of creating a “People’s University.”<sup>8</sup> In 1890, he held a meeting at the New York State Library for persons “interested in promoting the usefulness of New York libraries.” The New York Library Association (NYLA) resulted, with Dewey elected president.<sup>9</sup> Under Dewey’s leadership, New York State instituted a program of “travelling libraries” – consisting of one hundred titles – to bring books to rural areas. Elsewhere, Dewey’s focus on standardizing library equipment, techniques, and training led to the emergence of professional librarians – many of them female. The Amsterdam Library Association trustees sent its librarian, Jennie Coe Clark, to Dewey’s Library Summer School in 1901; her report of the summer session alerted the board members to many of the requirements for upgrading their library.

Corporate philanthropy to fund libraries also became a factor at the end of the nineteenth century. For example, in 1848 John Jacob Astor donated \$400,000 for a free public reference library in New York City, and others gave money for organizations that were renamed in their honor.<sup>10</sup> Andrew Carnegie built “monumental” buildings early in his philanthropic career but increasingly applied business principles after the turn of the century.<sup>11</sup> By his death in 1919, he had given away more than \$350 million, \$40 million of which built 1,679 new library buildings throughout the United States and Canada. Carnegie required communities to formally partner with him in developing those libraries; he paid only for the library building—the local community was required to supply a site, buy books, and levy public taxes to maintain the library and its staff.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Kathleen M. Walker, *The American Free Public Library Movement*, <https://historyofbooks.wordpress.com>; accessed 15 April 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Cecil R. Roseberry, *For the Government and People of this State: A History of the New York State Library* (1970), 64; <https://www.nyla>, accessed 14 April 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Roseberry, *A History of the New York State Library*, 63; these organizations remain active today and the Amsterdam Free Library remains associated with both.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Breisch, *American Libraries 1730-1950* (NY and London: W.W. Norton & Co., 2017),

<sup>11</sup> Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Walker, *The American Free Public Library Movement*.

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Women's voluntary associations were also critical to the success of the free library movement. It is estimated that between 75 and 80 percent of public libraries were started by local women's clubs.<sup>13</sup> One popular source of fundraising was to allow a local women's club to edit a single edition of a daily newspaper and donate the funds to the charity of their choice, often a library. On February 4, 1895, the *Amsterdam Daily Democrat* had reported that the *Syracuse Post* of that date was prepared exclusively by ladies with the proceeds going to charity. On February 13, the paper reported that ladies in Denver had made \$1,000 by a similar newspaper project. The Amsterdam library was later the beneficiary of a similar effort.

At the opening of the Amsterdam library, the Daughters of the American Revolution, as part of the official proceedings, reminded all that libraries not only supplemented children's schoolwork, but reached all ages and classes of the community. The Daughter's regent, Mrs. T.M. McEwen said, offered the following observation:

Those who pass as well as those who enter this beautiful building read over the door the inscription, Amsterdam Free Library, "Open To All." The thousands who every year come to us from other shores have, as one of their sights, "Liberty's Torch," enlightening the world. The inscription of our library, Open To All, has been the motto of our nation. In our schools the children of every tongue and nation meet on common ground of preparation for life.

### **Library Laws**

State legislation authorizing cities to levy and collect taxes for the purpose of establishing and maintaining free public libraries was the third significant event that resulted in thousands of new free public libraries throughout the country between 1886 and 1920.<sup>14</sup> The early library laws related to the founding of libraries; library administration; development of school libraries; rural and county libraries; and travelling libraries.<sup>15</sup> The laws regarding founding libraries were enabling laws, making it permissive, not mandatory, for communities to establish public libraries. The Regents of the University of the State of New York were created by statute in 1784. The regents were a corporation empowered to act as trustees of Columbia College and every other college and academy incorporated thereafter, and they were made trustees of the New York State Library in 1844. With Melvil Dewey's encouragement, an 1889 statute made local public libraries part of the University of the State of New York. An 1892 act liberalized the use of tax revenues for local public libraries, as authorized under laws of 1872 and 1887. During the 1890s nearly 500 free circulating libraries had been chartered. In 1892 the legislature designated funds to help libraries buy books; money for traveling libraries and Braille

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<sup>13</sup>Walker, *The American Free Public Library Movement*.

<sup>14</sup>Walker, *The American Free Public Library Movement*.

<sup>15</sup>Wiley, 1918 *Library Laws and Legislation in the United States*.

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books was also appropriated. The regents, with New York Library Association advice, set the first standards for public libraries in 1931.<sup>16</sup> In the 1920s the first county libraries were established in Chemung, Monroe and Tompkins counties. Twenty-two library systems were active in the state by 1961, providing management and technical services. Regional, research and reference libraries were formed into nine systems by 1966 to serve academic and business communities. Federal aid has been provided by Library Services Act (1957) and the Construction Act (1964). Governor Thomas Dewey's Library Committee (1949-50) led to the legislature accepting the principle of large-scale state aid for public library systems. Under the library law of 1950, the 22 public library systems were developed. These systems continue today to pass on state aid to local libraries. The Amsterdam Library is part of the Mohawk Valley Library System, which serves the four counties of Montgomery, Fulton, Schoharie and Schenectady. The Library Extension unit of the New York State Library grew into the Division of Library Development.<sup>17</sup> Today, there are several hundred pages of laws that affect local libraries. These laws allowed the Amsterdam Free Library to incorporate and become part of the University of the State of New York in 1902. A New York State law that allows a library to put a proposition on the school district ballot saved the Amsterdam Free Library from financial decline in 2016.

### **History of the Amsterdam Public Library**

The Amsterdam Free Library's history mirrored what was happening in the Free Library Movement across the United States. The first libraries in Amsterdam were subscription libraries. In 1805 the Amsterdam Union Free Library provided a reading room open one afternoon a week. This included the Town of Amsterdam; however, by 1840 the group had disbanded. A few years later a second organization, the Amsterdam Literary Association, with carpet mill founder John Sanford as president, was formed. The dues were one dollar per year, which helped pay the \$30 annual reading room rental. Soon that group also disbanded. For another 50 years other groups formed for brief periods.<sup>18</sup> On September 29, 1891, local citizens founded the city's first public library: the Amsterdam Library Association had been incorporated with nineteen trustees. Dr. William H. Robb was president; Dr. Salphronius French was vice-president; David Cady was treasurer; and M. Annie Trapnell was secretary. The association's first library was on lower Church Street. In 1895, a fund-raising project and a bequest enabled the association to make the library free to all. At its founding meeting, a visitor, David Hutchenson, an assistant librarian at the Library of Congress observed, "In a growing city like this, a public library is a necessity. The status of a community is fixed by the fact whether it has a public library or

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<sup>16</sup>*History of the University of the State of New York, VII Cultural Education*, [www.nysl.nysed.gov](http://www.nysl.nysed.gov)

<sup>17</sup>Roseberry, *A History of the New York State Library*, 110.

<sup>18</sup>Donlon, *Amsterdam New York*, 157.

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not.” The Amsterdam Library Association librarian, Jennie Coe Clark, who later attended Melvil Dewey’s library summer school in 1901, implored the board of trustees for leeway to apply the ideas of a modern librarianship. In 1895, M. Annie Trapnell, the library association’s secretary, issued the following caution in her annual report:

Rejoicing in our free library, there may be danger that the association and the public will forget that a free library needs funds for its support. The great increase in membership- almost three hundred in one month- and the large number of books put in circulation show plainly that a free library is necessity in our city. Some permanent property has been assured to the association, but the income from that property will not be sufficient to allow the successful carrying on of this work. What means shall be devised for the increase of our funds? Let the trustees and the generous public respond.

The early Amsterdam Library Association also had an annual fee of one dollar per year until the women of the board of trustees decided to take action. After learning of similar efforts in Syracuse and Denver, in 1895, William J. Kline, editor of the *Amsterdam Democrat*, offered the same chance to the ladies of Amsterdam, with proceeds going to the library. Ladies who were trustees of the library association were granted the chance to edit one edition of the *Amsterdam Evening Recorder*. On February 19, 1895, the paper reported the ladies’ plan for a “woman’s edition” with coverage in the following areas:

- Medicine – Dr. A.A. Steadman
- Art – Mrs. John H. Giles
- Philanthropy – Mrs. H. E. Greene
- Ye Olden Times – Mrs. Emily V. Devendorf
- Literature – Miss M. P. Schuler
- Education – Mrs. LeGrande S. Strang
- Religion – Mrs. Wm. A. Donnan
- Children and Youth – Mrs. Edmund F. Bronk
- Notes on Travel and Foreign Reminiscence – Mrs. John Sanford
- Fiction – Miss Harriet Stone
- Men’s Department – Mrs. Milfred Wheeler
- Life is Clubdom – Mrs. Thomas G. Hyland
- Domestic Economy – Mrs. William S. Shuler
- Music – Mrs. A.B. Haberer
- Answers to Correspondents – Mrs. Chas. L. Simpson
- Notes from School and College – Miss Eloise Van Derveer
- Society – Mrs. Charles Hubbs
- Drama – Miss Sadie E. White
- Sister Exchanges – Mrs. Thomas M. Billington
- Editors – Mrs. Annie Trapnell, Mrs. Stephen Sanford, Mrs. Henry E. Greene; Managing editors – Miss M.P. Shuler, Mrs. E. P. White, Miss S. Louise Bell; City Editor – Mrs. Wm. J. Kline; Vicinity Editor – Mrs. George H. Loadwick; Telegraphic Editor – Mrs. Wm. H. Robb.

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Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote an article about her friend and co-laborer, Frederick Douglass, and other coverage included sporting, wit and humor, and temperance. Women were in the library two hours each day to answer questions about advertising.<sup>19</sup>

On February 21, 1895, the *Democrat* noted that 10,000 copies of the “Woman’s Paper” would be printed and that it would reach 50,000 readers. The first copy was to be sold for \$100 and the early copies were auctioned off to business and professional people. A cash prize was given to the carrier who sold the most copies. The ladies’ edition on March 29, 1895 made \$1,500; that money allowed the library to stop charging and become a free library on May 18, 1895. On May 20, 1895 the *Daily Democrat* offered the following comments:

The action of the trustees of the City library, in making that institution free to all citizens of Amsterdam, is most commendable. Hereafter the benefits of the library may be obtained without cost by the poorest citizens of Amsterdam. Great good to the community must necessarily result from this action of the library trustees, and it is gratifying to the *Democrat* to know that this action was made possible by the proceeds obtained from the Woman’s Edition of this paper.”<sup>20</sup>

Subsequently, the board was granted membership in the University of the State of New York.<sup>21</sup> In 1901, Amsterdam librarian Jennie Coe Clark was granted a leave of absence to attend the summer session of New York State Library School at Albany during a portion of May and June. She reported to the board of trustees that “besides valuable technical training so many subjects connected with the practical workings of a library were there discussed and such an impulse given to work for the same, that the librarian has deemed it fitting at this time to give some account of the course and its place in the general scheme of education in our state....”<sup>22</sup> Clark then offered a detailed account of her course and the structure and state of the University of the State of New York and the regents of the university and library education in New York State. She attended the library school of the University of the State of New York. A high school course and four years at one of the best colleges were required for admission. Clark described lectures on cataloguing, reference work, binding, printing, typography, paper and press work, proof reading, bibliography, book selection and lectures from Dewey. Practical work was done on many of these lectures. Clark listed many direct applications of her summer course to the Amsterdam library, including development of a subject card catalogue for all new books

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<sup>19</sup>Amsterdam Free Library Scrapbook 1892-1903, *Daily Democrat*, 19 February 1895, 3-4.

<sup>20</sup>Amsterdam Free Library Scrapbook 1892- 1903, *Daily Democrat*, 19 February 1895, 11.

<sup>21</sup>*Amsterdam Evening Recorder*, 2 November 1903.

<sup>22</sup>Amsterdam Free Library Scrapbook 1892-1903; Library Association Annual Business Meeting of Trustees, 30-32.

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and a separate space for children, and she instructed the trustees that they must face the problem of lack of space. Clark also offered considerable praise for Melvil Dewey's opening lecture, "The Point of View," of which she offered the following: "...he would impress upon all his students to do all the good they can do to make people happier and better to ever strive upward and onward with faith, courage and enthusiasm and steadfast purpose." She noted that he "spoke often of the three planes of work, physical, mental and moral:"

The physical as a horse might work with no thought of anything higher; the mental filled with greater intellectual ambition, a great desire 'to know,' and the moral...for the janitor to do his work on the highest order and the librarian on the lowest [and that he was fond of saying] that if he must choose for his son between a college course and some time alone on the mountain top with a noble and lofty spirit who would fill the boy with love and zeal and aspiration for higher things, he would choose the latter. Later in the course he gave several lectures on the qualifications of a librarian, the high ideals of which Mr. Dewey himself realizes so fully. He is the very spirit of progress....<sup>23</sup>

Dr. Salphronius French, a Civil War surgeon and officer, was an 1887 founder and president of the Amsterdam Savings Bank and a founder and the second president of Amsterdam Free Library's Board of Trustees. He succeeded Dr. Robb, who died in January 1898, as president and served until his own death in 1920; subsequently his son, Charles, replaced him and served as president for 45 years until his death. Salphronius's granddaughter and Charles's daughter, Eleanor French Blessing, served another seven years as president of the library board of trustees. That collectively represents 81 years of service on behalf of the library by the French family. Dr. Salphronius French was president of the library during its reincorporation 1902, when its name was changed to Amsterdam Free Library, and he oversaw its building campaign in 1905. Dr. French is given much of the credit for the success of the library. In the October 20, 1902 *Amsterdam Daily Democrat*, M. Annie Trapnell, the longtime library secretary, praised Dr. French, saying that he gave himself "with zeal, energy and devotion to the work of the institution. Much of the present prosperity of the library is due to his persevering and untiring efforts in its behalf."<sup>24</sup>

In 1902, French wrote to the industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie asking for help building the library. Like Carnegie, French believed that public libraries provided the means for betterment through self-education, a common belief held by many during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over 2,500 libraries throughout the English-speaking world were built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with a grant from Andrew Carnegie, which required that the community create a public subsidy for the library

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<sup>23</sup>Amsterdam Free Library Scrapbook 1892- 1903, Library Association Annual Business Meeting of Trustees, 30-32.

<sup>24</sup>M. Annie Trapnell, Amsterdam Free Library Scrapbook, *Amsterdam Daily Democrat*, 20 October 1902.

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that equaled 10 percent of the construction costs. Carnegie responded to French that “if the city of Amsterdam will pledge itself to support a free library at a cost of not less than \$2,500 a year and provide a suitable site, I will be glad to furnish \$25,000 to erect a free public library building.”<sup>25</sup> In response to Carnegie’s offer, the board set up two committees: one to find a site for the library and another to secure the city’s agreement to spend \$2,500 each year on the library. A public ballot was set up in 1902, and the citizens voted five to one to accept Carnegie’s offer.<sup>26</sup> French came to oversee the building campaign and the official opening of the library.

At the 1:45 pm on October 20, 1902 the Artisan Lodge No. 84 and Welcome Lodge No. 829 of the Free and Accepted Masons began the cornerstone ceremony. Dr. French was introduced by Masonic Grand Master Daniel A. Bissell of Gloversville with these words, “... one whose public service as a practitioner extends over a period of 35 years. He has identified himself with all the best interests of your growing city...he has given his time, his means, and wise counsels to further this noble project, and it is largely owing to his wise management that this imposing structure is in process of erection...”<sup>27</sup>

Dr. French then spoke, presenting his reasons for promoting the new library, which he believed would elevate the local citizenry, prevent crime, and foster civic pride:

It is now eleven years since our public library was opened. At that time its capital was what time and money its promoters could put into it, and its endowment was an unlimited faith in its future. Believing that where education was general and diffused, crime, pauperism and misery were less abundant, and believing our common schools needed such an adjunct, the founders of this library organized this public charity on altruistic lines and naturally fell a just pride in the results of their endeavors. They believe the time had come when a city of 20,000 inhabitants should no longer be behind the country villages in the eastern states. They also believed the public would sustain them in the endeavor, and this belief has been abundantly verified in contributions and at the polls. Slowly the public came to understand that the library was their library, and that the persons managing it were not stockholders or owners, but trustees holding this sacred trust for the benefit of the people. Many things have contributed to our success, such as the Women’s paper and the magnificence of David Cady and Andrew Carnegie, but over and above all I would put the fact that the time was ripe and the founders were in every way capable and worthy of the trust they assumed. This is a red letter day in the annals of our library, and certainly a very happy day for all the men and women whose devotion and faithfulness has contributed so much toward making this day possible. Our joy is mingled with regret that those noble souls, David Cady, Dr. Robb, Dr. Steadman, Mrs. Sanford, Miss Shuler, and Miss Kennedy cannot be alive today to see the results of their labors. But we may not believe that by their faith and prophetic foresight they saw while on earth what we now see, just as we now see in the distant future a venerable building amply endowed, with its enlarged stock room unable to hold all the books; its reading rooms crowded with students, and its steps worn and hallowed by the feet of generations of book lovers who came here for light and wisdom. Under the guidance of a beneficent Providence this vision of the future will become true if the management of our public library always proves true to the traditions of the past in keeping it free from strife

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<sup>26</sup>M. Annie Trapnell, Amsterdam Free Library Scrapbook, *Daily Democrat*, 7 January 1903; Annual Meeting, Amsterdam Free Library Scrap Book, 42.

<sup>27</sup>Amsterdam Free Library Scrapbook, *Daily Democrat*, 7 January 1903, 36.



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of partisan politics and sectarian religion, and administers this trust solely for the good of what Abraham Lincoln called plain people. Then this noble institution will be a potent influence for good in shaping and molding the lives of future generations and a perpetual benison to the people of the city.<sup>28</sup>

### **Architectural Context**

The Amsterdam Free Library is architecturally significant as an embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of the Beaux-Arts Neoclassical style popular in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as an example of early twentieth century library design, and as a well-preserved example of the work of the Albany architectural office of Fuller & Pitcher, the principals of which were Albert W. Fuller (1854-1934) and his younger partner, William B. Pitcher (1864-1921). Fuller first practiced architecture independently in 1879 and then went into partnership with William A. Wheeler, a professional association that lasted until 1897. Fuller then worked independently until 1900, at which time he brought in Pitcher, a former draftsman in his office, into full partnership. Their professional association lasted from 1900 until 1909, at which time Pitcher retired due to poor health. Fuller later partnered with William P. Robinson. He died in his office from heart disease in 1934.

A.W. Fuller was a versatile architect who designed a full range of buildings during his career, among them dwellings, churches, schools, YMCAs, Masonic temples, hospitals, college buildings and other public and private edifices; many were erected in the Capital District area, as well as other parts of New York, other states, and Canada. He gained his first professional experience in the architectural offices of Ogden & Wright in Albany, prior to striking out on his own. His work in the Mohawk Valley region included the Johnstown Public library, 1902; Ellis Hospital in Schenectady, 1904; Guy Park Avenue School in Amsterdam, 1902; the Montgomery County Court House in Fonda, and the Alpha Delta Phi fraternity house at Union College in Schenectady, among others.

The Amsterdam library was built by contractor-builder Bernard P. Machold.<sup>29</sup> Machold learned his trade in Germany and came to New York in 1868. He resided in Albany and Johnstown before permanently settling in Amsterdam in 1869; there he developed a successful contracting and mason business. Machold built five of the largest churches in Amsterdam, the library and many other business and private structures; he was clearly the

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<sup>28</sup>Amsterdam Free Library Scrap Book, *Daily Democrat*, "The Corner Stone in Place," 1902, 38.

<sup>29</sup>Hudson-Mohawk Genealogical and family Memoirs: [www.schenectadyhistory.org/families/hmeggfm/mschold.html](http://www.schenectadyhistory.org/families/hmeggfm/mschold.html), Machold, accessed 4/17/2018, 1.

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preeminent contractor-builder active there at the time. Machold became a prominent citizen in Amsterdam's affairs, serving as a bank trustee and a member of the water board and sewer board. He was additionally a Free Mason and a member of the German Lodge of Odd Fellows. One of his sons served in the Union Army during the Civil War, while another studied at Cornell.

The building's façade displays salient aspects of the Beaux-Arts style, an eclectic French Neoclassical idiom that many American architects became familiar with as students of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the post-Civil War era. Beaux-Arts architecture is characterized by thoughtful, rational interior planning and monumental exteriors with robust classical detailing sometimes drawn from multiple sources, composed in rigidly symmetrical fashion. The façade of the library exhibits the characteristic bilateral symmetry, receding and projecting wall planes, sculptural enrichment, and distinctive classical detailing of this mode. The division of the façade into three principal bays framed by rusticated piers, the outer bays being framed by monumental columns, along with its sculptural embellishment and the deep cornice and crowing parapet, are characteristic, as is the subtle polychrome effect of the contrasting masonry materials. The robust classical treatments mark the building as an important one, and it forms a relatively rare example of Beaux-Arts architecture in the region. It also bears considerable similarity, in many regards, to the library which Fuller & Pitcher designed for nearby Johnstown slightly earlier, in 1902. While differences are to be found in the overall character of the detailing, the two buildings nevertheless share the same three-bay, rigidly symmetrical facades with center pavilion motifs, hipped roofs, and large segmental-arched windows. The classical character of the Amsterdam building is more pronounced, on account of the use of monumental columns in the outer bays, the more developed sculptural embellishment of the upper wall planes, and the rustication of the walls and piers.

At the time the Amsterdam building was erected, the American library was still an emergent building type—Carnegie's philanthropic efforts relative to libraries was initiated in the United States in the later 1880s, but expanded considerably around 1900—and one which gained more concrete form following the publication of Arthur Bostwick's 1910 book *The American Public Library*.<sup>30</sup> In that work Bostwick published plans for a number of libraries which were deemed to be of importance to the larger subject of American library planning and design. Similarities in the disposition of interior space and features are to be found in comparing the ground floor plan of the Brooklyn Public Library at Flatbush, 1905, with that of the Amsterdam library. In both instances the interior was laid out in symmetrical fashion, echoing the

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<sup>30</sup>Arthur E. Bostwick, *The American Public Library* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1910), 5-6.

AMSTERDAM FREE LIBRARY  
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outside elevations in rational fashion, with a centrally placed delivery desk, rear book stacks, and reading rooms located in the two principal spaces at the front of the plan; both also contained dedicated space for the librarian.

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Name of Property

MONTGOMERY CO., NY  
County and State

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

- Bostwick, Arthur E. *The American Public Library*. New York: Appleton & Company, 1910.
- Donlon, Hugh P. *Amsterdam New York Annals of a Mill Town*. Amsterdam, New York: 1980.
- Roseberry, Cecil R. *For the Government and People of this State: A History of the New York State Library*. 1970.
- Van Slyck, Abigail A. *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of depository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** .23 acres  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

|   |           |               |                |   |       |         |          |
|---|-----------|---------------|----------------|---|-------|---------|----------|
| 1 | <u>18</u> | <u>566016</u> | <u>4754208</u> | 3 | _____ | _____   | _____    |
|   | Zone      | Easting       | Northing       |   | Zone  | Easting | Northing |
| 2 | _____     | _____         | _____          | 4 | _____ | _____   | _____    |
|   | Zone      | Easting       | Northing       |   | Zone  | Easting | Northing |

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary for this NRHP nomination is shown on the enclosed maps, all of which are entitled "Amsterdam Free Library, City of Amsterdam, Montgomery Co., NY."

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary was drawn to reflect historic circumstances and thus largely corresponds with the building's footprint; a large adjacent parking lot to the south has been excluded from the boundary; it was at one time occupied by adjacent buildings, since demolished, and thus represents a more recent development.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title John Naple; edited by William E. Krattinger, NYS Division for Historic Preservation  
organization Amsterdam Free Library date October 2019  
street & number 28 Church Street telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Amsterdam state NY zip code 12010  
e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

**Photographs:**

Photographs by John Naple and Nicole Hemsley, March and September 2019  
TIFF file format, original digital files at NYS Division for Historic Preservation, Waterford N.Y. 12188

- 001 EXTERIOR, east-facing façade, view looking west
- 002 EXTERIOR, south elevation, view looking north showing original front and rear blocks
- 003 EXTERIOR, south elevation, view looking north showing later rear wing, at left
- 004 EXTERIOR, west elevation, view looking to northeast showing addition with bay window
- 005 EXTERIOR, north elevation, view showing later rear wing and intersection with original rear block
- 006 EXTERIOR, north elevation, view showing rear block
- 007 EXTERIOR, north elevation, view showing lower wall of front block
- 008 EXTERIOR, north elevation, detail view of window, rusticated piers and ornamentation
- 009 INTERIOR, first floor, lobby area, view looking towards vestibule doors and south reading room
- 010 INTERIOR, first floor, main desk, view looking west into rear addition
- 011 INTERIOR, first floor, view looking towards main desk from south reading room
- 012 INTERIOR, first floor, south reading room, view to southeast
- 013 INTERIOR, first floor, north reading room, view to northeast
- 014 INTERIOR, first floor, view into rear addition
- 015 INTERIOR, first floor, rear addition, west-facing bay window at left
- 016 INTERIOR, second floor, children's area

**Property Owner:**

name \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

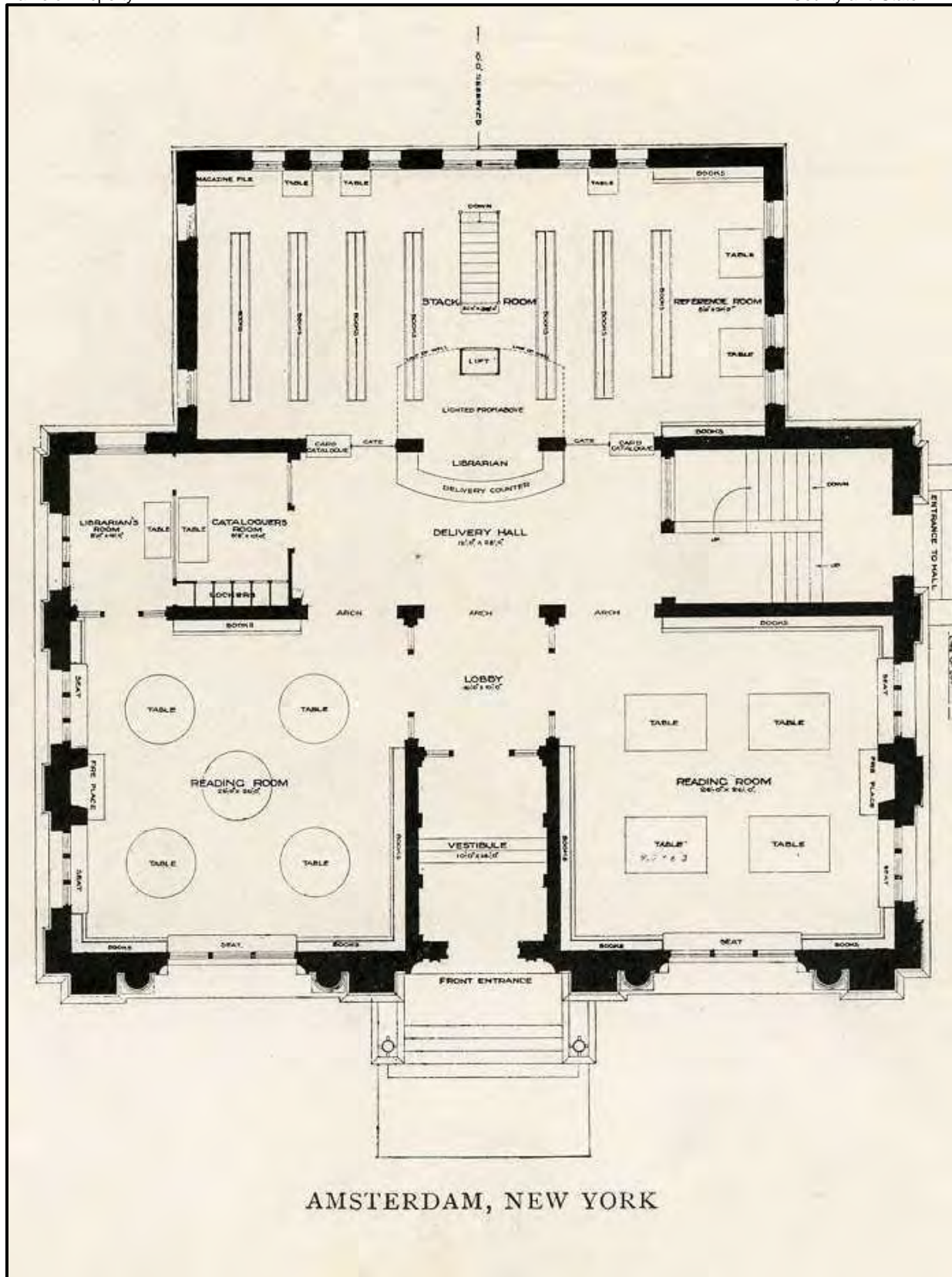
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

AMSTERDAM FREE LIBRARY

Name of Property

MONTGOMERY CO., NY

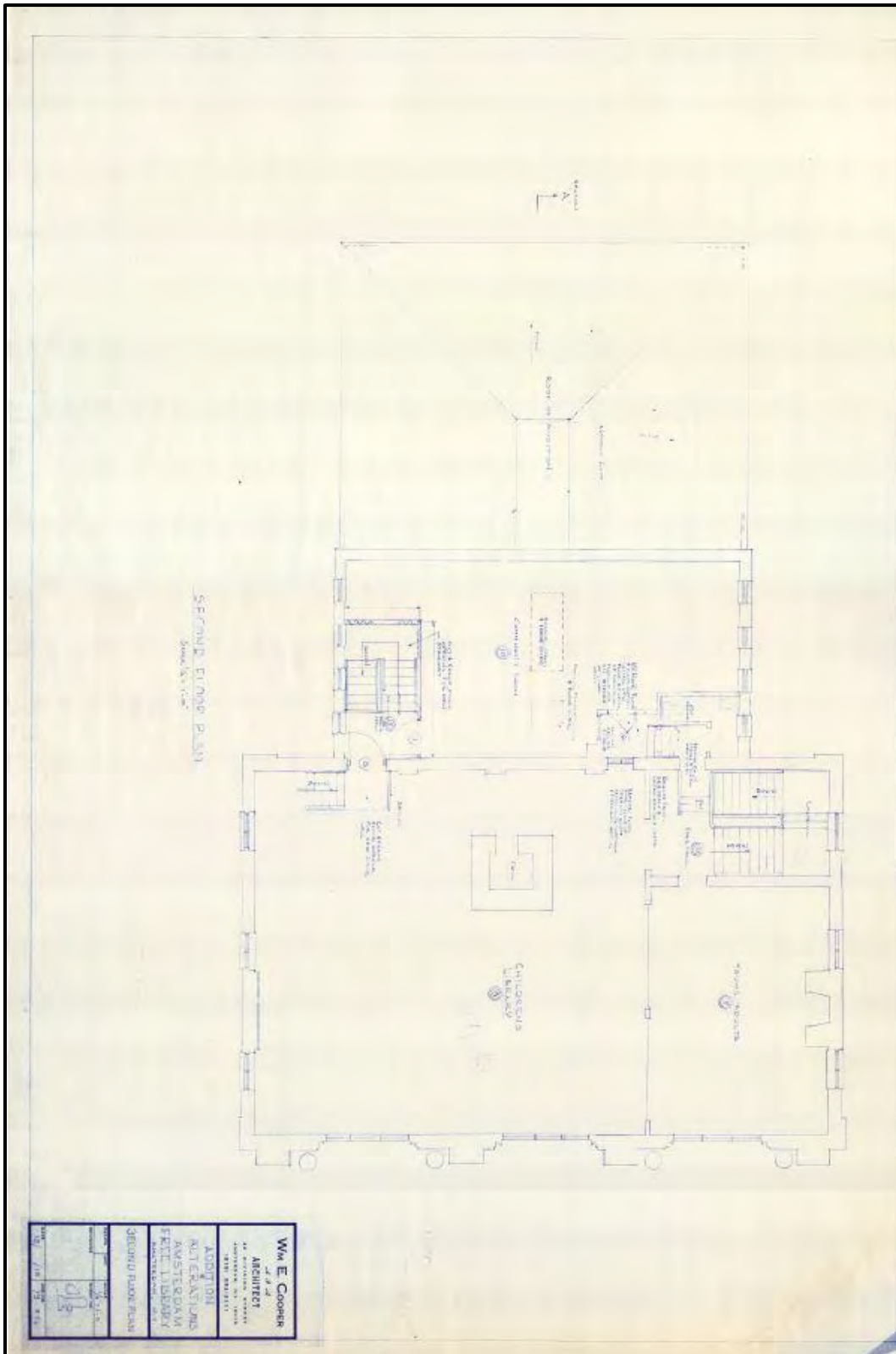
County and State



Above, First Floor plan, 1902; depicts building prior to rear addition

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Name of Property

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County and State

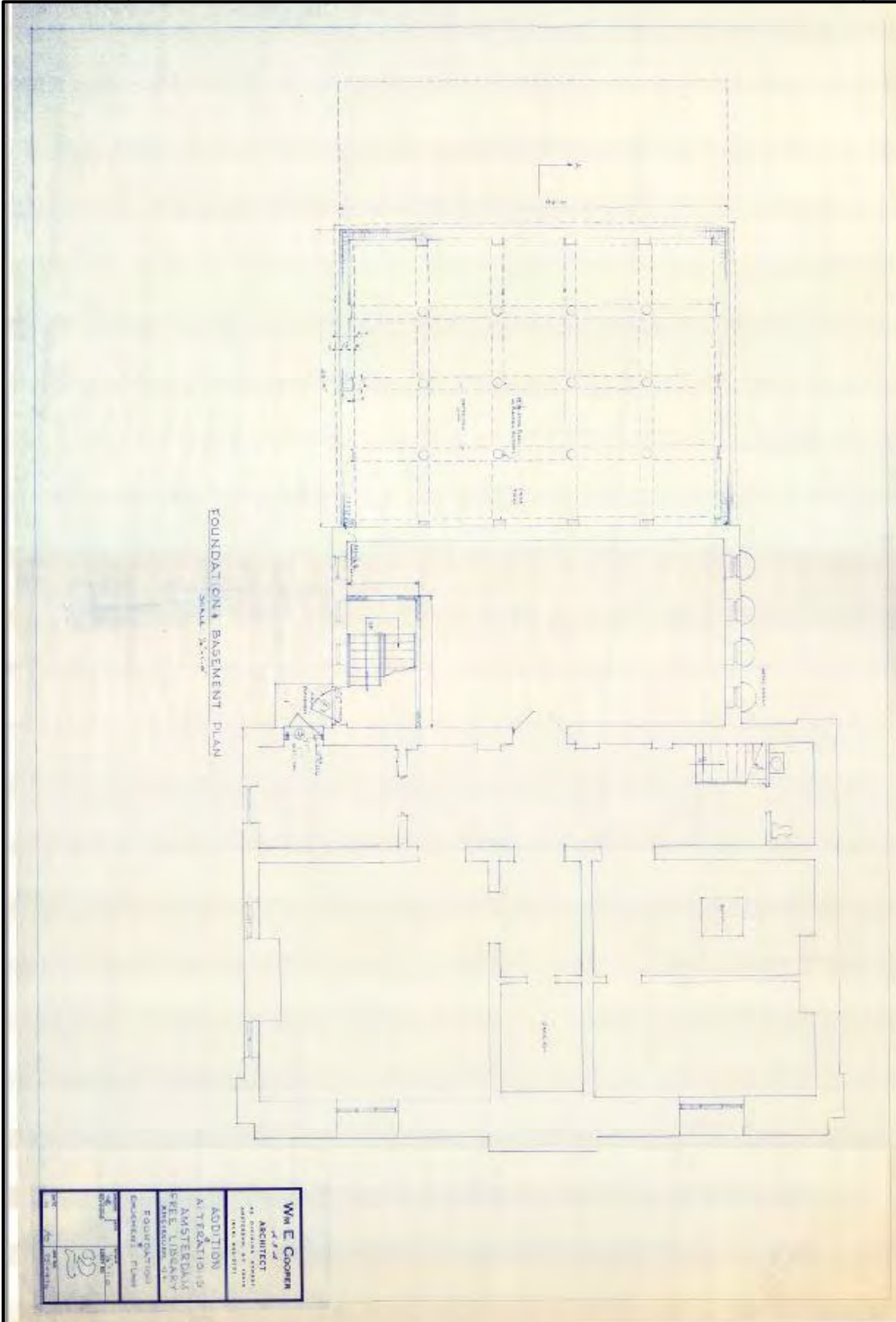


Above, Second Floor Plan, Wm. E. Cooper, 1979.



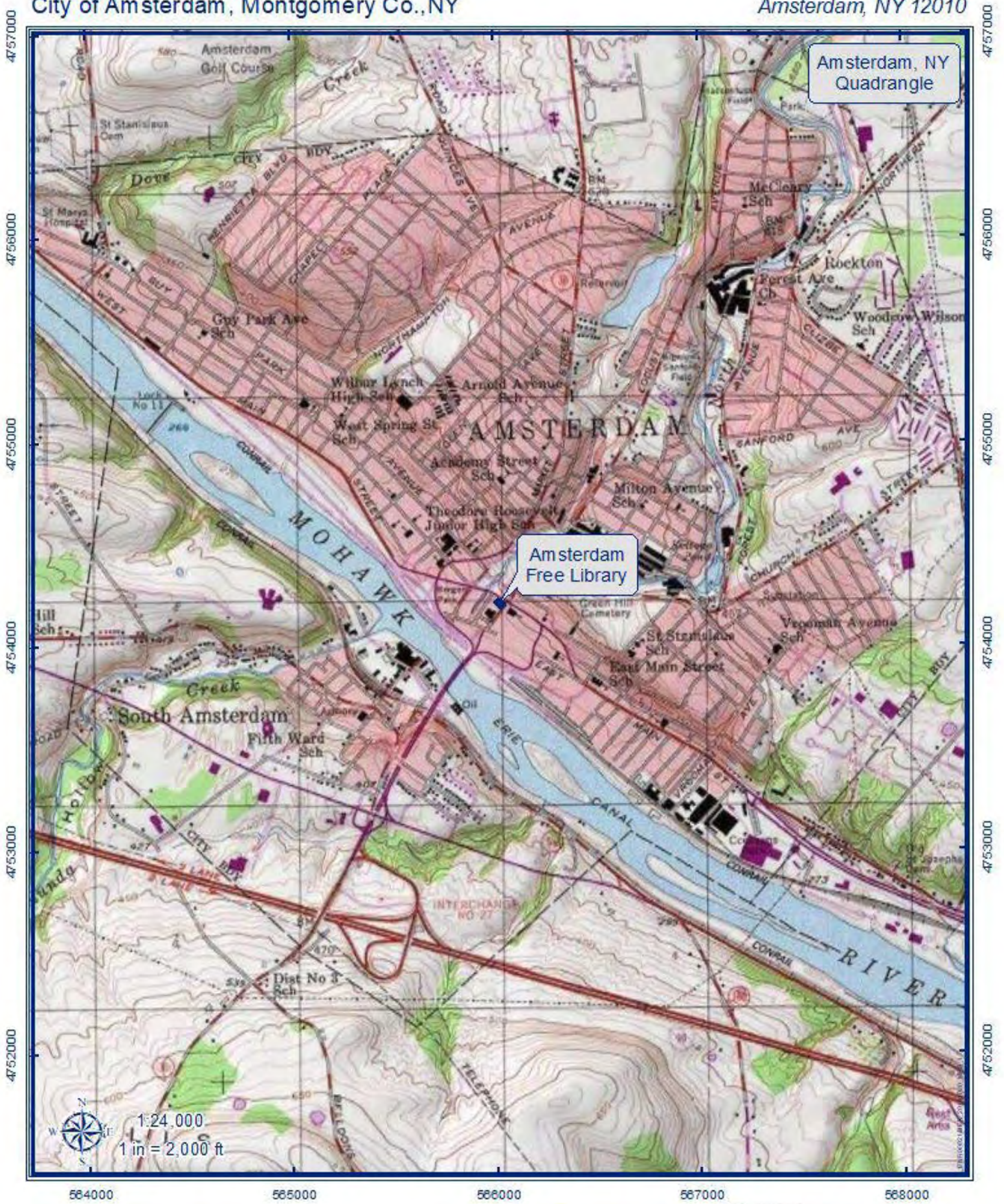
AMSTERDAM FREE LIBRARY  
Name of Property

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Above, Foundation and Basement Plan, Wm. E. Cooper, 1979





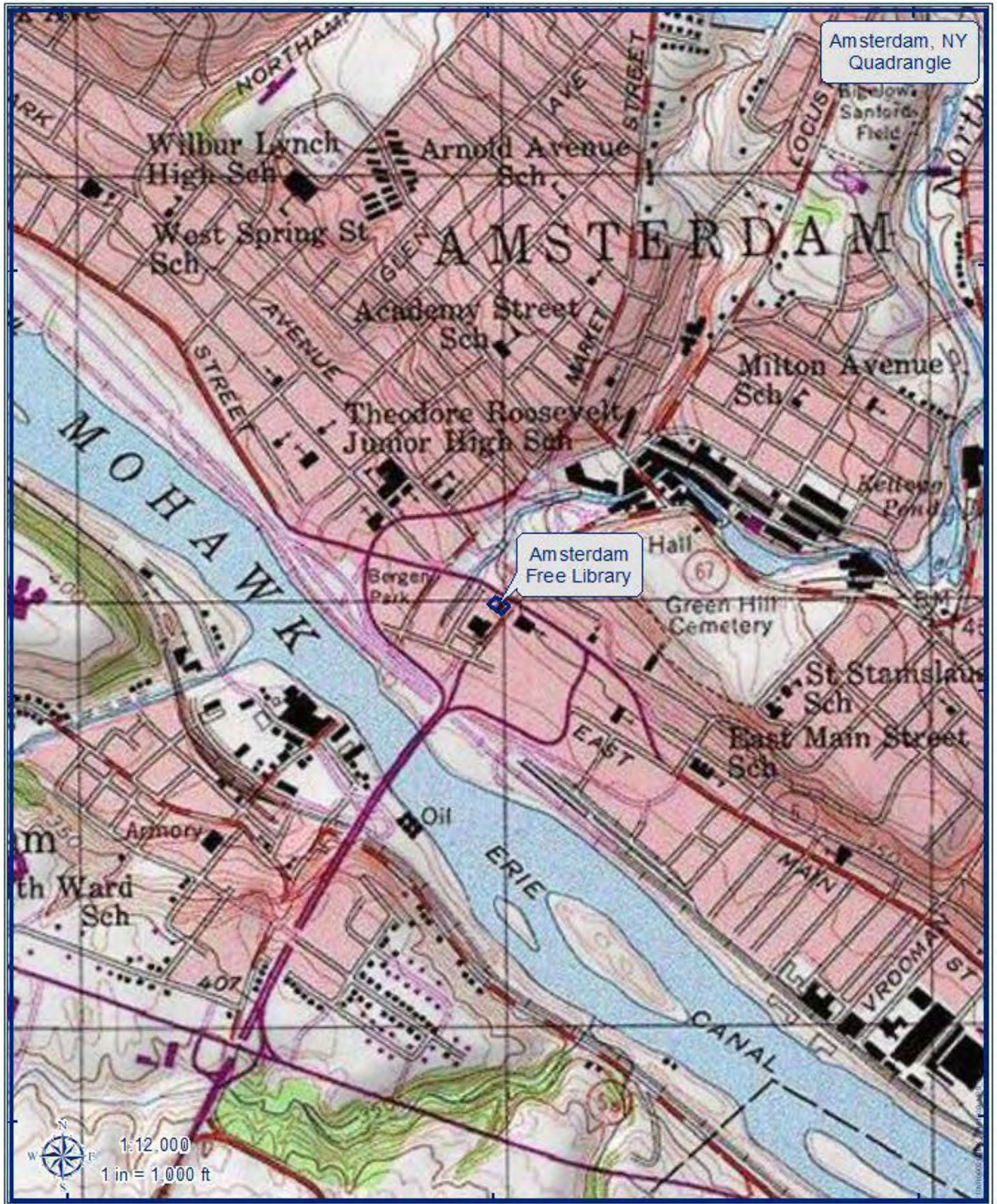
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Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation

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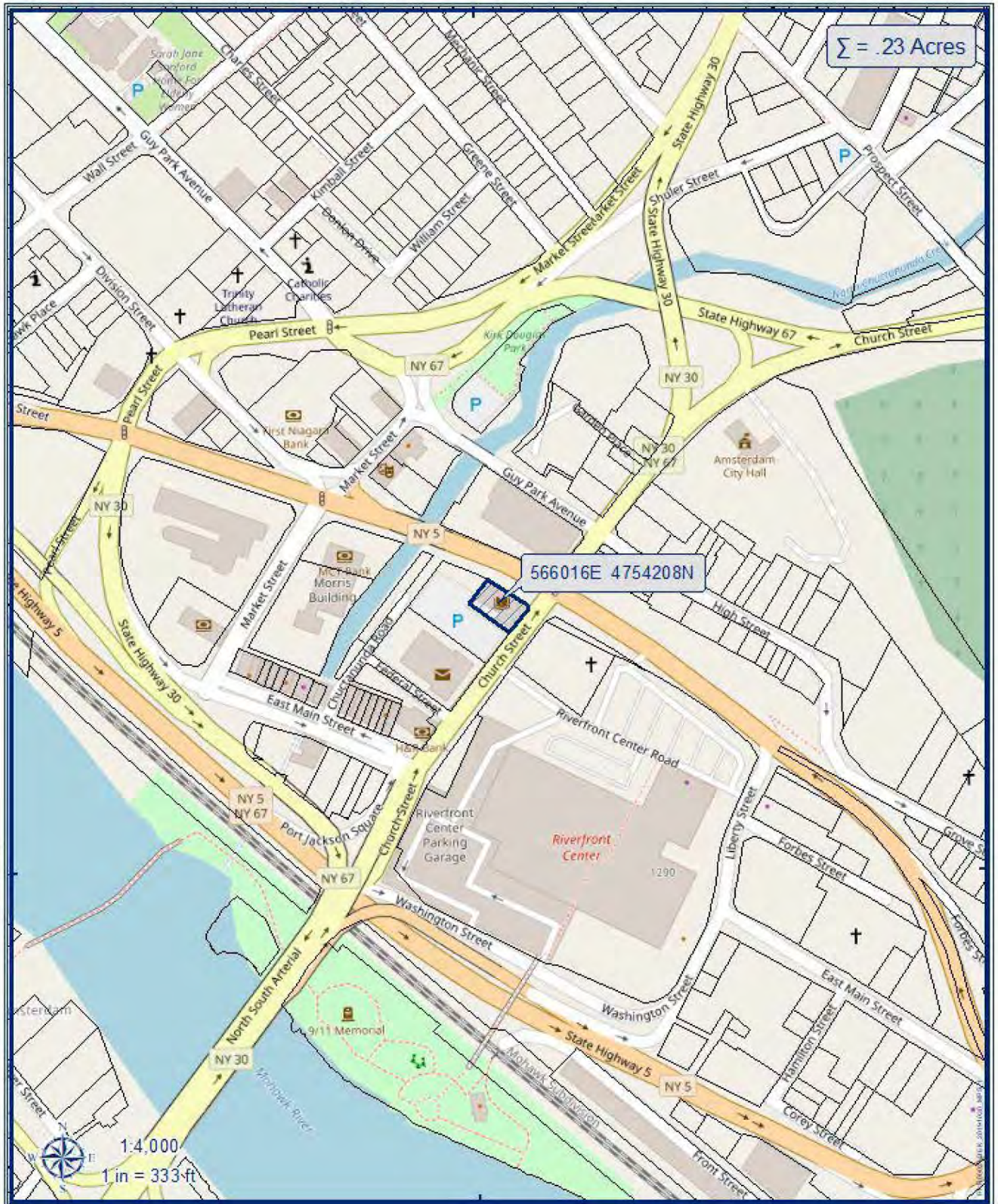
Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



Parks, Recreation  
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Division for Historic Preservation





$\Sigma = .23$  Acres

566016E 4754208N

4754000

4754000

566000

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter











AMSTERDAM FREE LIBRARY

OPEN TO ALL





































HALL OF HONOR

A display board titled "HALL OF HONOR" featuring various historical photographs and documents. One prominent document reads: "A Submerged Railroad - Historic Project of the Upper Midwest, Inc." Other items include smaller photos and text snippets, some with red highlights.



**CHICKEN PAPER DINNER**  
 1985-1986  
 The Chicken Paper Dinner is a special event held annually in the library. It is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy a delicious meal while supporting the library's operations. The dinner is held in the library's dining room and is open to all. For more information, please contact the library staff.

THE HISTORY OF  
 REID & PARK HILLS  
 A HISTORY OF  
 REID & PARK HILLS











Neena Rao  
Digital Learning  
Dr. Ganesha & Mrs. Anjali Rao & Family  
connecting community. open

Neena Rao











Restrooms

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GOOD APPRENTICE  
THE WHITE TIGER  
EIGHT  
THE FIRE  
NEVILLE GARDEN  
DAVID MAYER  
THE SCPL





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 11/6/2019      Date of Pending List: 12/6/2019      Date of 16th Day: 12/23/2019      Date of 45th Day: 12/23/2019      Date of Weekly List: 12/30/2019

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept       Return       Reject      12/23/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary  
Comments:

Recommendation/  
Criteria

Reviewer Alexis Abernathy      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2236      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



**Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation**

**ANDREW M. CUOMO**  
Governor

**ERIK KULLESEID**  
Commissioner

4 November 2019

Alexis Abernathy  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places

Mail Stop 7228

1849 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20240

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following six nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Amsterdam Free Library, Amsterdam, Montgomery County  
First Presbyterian Church of Watkins Glen, Watkins Glen, Schuyler County  
Richard Pousette-Dart House and Studio, Suffern, Rockland County  
Clyde Downtown Historic District, Clyde, Wayne County (52 owners, 0 objections)  
Boarding House at 72-74 Sycamore Street, Buffalo, Erie County  
Polvino Building, Rochester, Monroe County

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank  
National Register Coordinator  
New York State Historic Preservation Office