

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

For NPS use only

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

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Furness Library, School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 34th Street below Walnut Street

not for publication

city, town Philadelphia

vicinity of

state Pennsylvania

code 42

county Philadelphia

code 101

3. Classification

Category

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

Ownership

- public
 - private
 - both
- Public Acquisition**
- in process
 - being considered

Status

- occupied
 - unoccupied
 - work in progress
- Accessible**
- yes: restricted
 - yes: unrestricted
 - no

Present Use

- agriculture
- commercial
- educational
- entertainment
- government
- industrial
- military
- museum
- park
- private residence
- religious
- scientific
- transportation
- other:

4. Owner of Property

name University of Pennsylvania

street & number 34th and Walnut Streets

city, town Philadelphia

vicinity of

state Pennsylvania

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Department of Records, City Hall

street & number City Hall - Philadelphia

city, town Philadelphia

state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic American Building Survey

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records National Park Service

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Description

A major work of Frank Furness, an important late 19th century architect, the library was a masterpiece of design when built. Begun in 1888, the exterior appears to be a red-brick and stone, Gothic ecclesiastical structure with gargoyles and crockets and with the Romanesque details of large rounded arches and heavily rusticated stone. The building is constructed of iron and brick with terra-cotta and smooth and pecked redstone trim. The plan is approximately 140 feet along an 8 bay front by 80 feet with a three story lateral book stack. There were side and rear additions, in fact, the library was designed to be added to; the book stack wing could be extended as needed with the growth of the collection. Part of the integrity of this building is its passage through time with additions as part of its historical importance (There were changes and additions in 1914, 1923, 1931, 1947, 1963, and 1982).

There are four stories on a raised basement with a five-story square battlemented tower, a tile hipped roof with cross gable on the main section and with tiled conical roof on the apsidal north end and glass gable, shed roofs on the book stacks.

The Entrance is a massive porch of dressed stone that leads one into the entry which is dominated by a great iron staircase that rises the full height of the 95 foot tower. In Furness' original design the main reading room and tower were on the left, and to the right, the three-story housing for the stacks.

The main area of the library was the large catalogue room whose walls originally rose majestically to an iron-vaulted ceiling three stories above. Unfortunately, the third story was closed over in later years to gain more usable space. The catalogue itself called forth favorable comment for it stood between public and staff areas, and was accessible from both sides. To the north of the catalogue room is the large apsidal-shaped reading room, divided into six alcoves, and rising to a high-vaulted ceiling carried on curving iron beams radiating around the semicircular apse. The stacks were in a wing to the south that was designed to be extended a bay at a time by simply pushing out the end walls on jack screws and adding more metal book stacks. Light flooded the stacks -- through the glass roof and down through a novel system of translucent glass floors that, with the exception of the iron supports, were not butted into the metal stacks, but rather floated freely through the aisles allowing circulation of air as well as light.¹

It is the monumental foliate detailing that distinguishes the interior. There are the typical Furnessian compressed columns and the elegant terra-cotta ornament that embellish his buildings. The newest addition to the building houses the Louis Kahn Collection as well as a rare architectural book collection.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1888 **Builder/Architect** Frank Furness (1839-1912)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Frank Furness is now recognized as one of the most important architects of the 19th century and, along with H.H. Richardson, the most important designer of libraries in the country. The University of Pennsylvania library was considered the most innovative library of its time. It was one of the first to separate the reading room and book stacks. Books were kept in a separate wing, which was designed so that the rear wall could be removed on jackscrews and new bays added as needed. Light was admitted through translucent glass floors and a sloping glass roof.

"The building was started in 1888, completed in 1890 at a cost of \$200,000, and dedicated in 1891. Librarians considered it a masterpiece of library planning and function. At the dedication, the University's Provost, Dr. William Pepper, said, "What we see here today is indeed impressive. The genius of the architect has wrought into this admirable form the complex needs of a great library." The Library Journal (August, 1888) considered it the nation's best college library building."²

Ultimately it is the rich foliate ornament that covers the exterior and interior in contrast with the color of the building material -- brick, limestone, and terracotta -- that makes the structure so unique. The penchant for a personal ornament reached its fullest expression in the work of Louis Sullivan a decade later. The library interior is made even richer by beautiful leaded-glass windows embellished with pithy sayings from Shakespeare and Greek and Latin classics. The windows are in keeping with Ruskin's philosophy concerning hand crafts and moralizing. Probably meant for students, one of the most beautiful reads, "Talkers are no great doers." Gothic types of ornament also embellish the large fireplace in the reading room that is reminiscent of the Queen Anne decoration of Shaw and Webb in England and of Ware and Van Brunt and H.H. Richardson in America.

"However, Furness also embraced modern technology, and among the most noticeable interior features of the building is the substantial use of exposed iron. In part, this is explained by the influence of Viollet-le-Duc, who espoused this practice. The cusped iron brackets supporting the lantern in the reading area were probably inspired by the Frenchman's design for a similar construction in his Entretiens sur l'architecture (Vol. II, Pl. 19).

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 39,894 sq. feet

Quadrangle name Philadelphia

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References

A

1	8	4	8	3	4	8	0	4	4	2	2	1	8	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

organization National Park Service

date August 10, 1984

street & number 1100 L Street, NW

telephone (202) 343-8166

city or town Washington

state DC 20240

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 _____ date _____

For NPS use only

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

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

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One of the most significant differences between the library and Furness' earlier buildings can be seen in the metalwork—especially in the stair tower. No longer was Furness designing his own metalwork, with its unique cusped and abstract vegetal forms, such as those seen in the stair rails of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts."³

This ready-made ornament is the result of Philadelphia becoming a center of ironworking with firms such as Wood and Perot and Samuel Yellin. They achieved national fame with their products. Frank Turness was aware of technological innovations and adapted his ornament to standardized motifs that could be more easily produced.

The Furness Library is one of the last Ruskinian Victorian buildings but it was, in addition to its Victorian aspect, an uncompromising functional masterpiece. Its ornamental interiors would soon be replaced by in America Neo-Classical purity as practiced by McKim, Mead and White.

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Footnotes

- 1 Massey, James. Charette. October 1963 Frank Furness in the 1880's. p. 29.
- 2 Ibid. p. 29.
- 3 Architecture and Ornament in Late 19th-Century America. University of Delaware, 1981, p. 26.

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Bibliographical Reference

Campbell, William "Frank Furness, An American Pioneer," Architectural Review
(London), November, 1951.

Massey, James C. "Frank Furness in the 1880's--the Successful Architect,"
Charette, October, 1963, pp. 25 ff.

O'Gorman, James F. The Architecture of Frank Furness Philadelphia Museum of
Art, 1973.

Architecture and Ornament in Late 19th century America. University of Delaware,
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VERBAL BOUNDARY

Beginning at a point on the northeast corner on the 34th Street side, approximately 180 feet south, west 195 feet along the facade, north 176 feet along the 33rd Street side, east approximately 100 feet to an apse 38.7 feet in radius, continue east for approximately 57 feet to point of beginning.