

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**DATA SHEET**

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED **OCT 21 1975**  
DATE ENTERED **DEC 6 1975**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON

Deborah Cook Sayles Public Library

Pawtucket Public Library

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

13 Summer Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Pawtucket

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1 St. Germain

STATE

Rhode Island

VICINITY OF

CODE  
44

COUNTY

Providence

CODE  
007

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

City of Pawtucket

STREET & NUMBER

Pawtucket City Hall, 137 Roosevelt Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Pawtucket

STATE

Rhode Island

VICINITY OF

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Pawtucket City Hall

STREET & NUMBER

137 Roosevelt Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Pawtucket

STATE

Rhode Island

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Rhode Island Statewide Inventory

DATE

1974

FEDERAL  STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Providence,

STATE

Rhode Island

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

---

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

On November 25, 1895, Deborah Cook Sayles died in Pawtucket. She was the wife of Frederic Clark Sayles, the first mayor of the city (1886-1887) and a leading industrialist and philanthropist. As a memorial to his wife, Mr. Sayles decided to present a building to the city to be used as the home of the Pawtucket Library Association, incorporated in 1852. That building continues to serve as a prominent educational/cultural center and as a major architectural landmark for the City of Pawtucket.

Sayles assembled a committee of experts to determine the needs of the library. They recommended an "open shelf" system and a facility with the capacity of 50-70,000 volumes. While Mr. Sayles went off to Europe to study the architecture of foreign libraries, an architectural competition for the building was announced and twenty-four firms were invited to participate. The successful office was Cram, Goodhue and Fergusson of Boston who submitted plans for a granite structure, based on Greek precedents. The cornerstone was laid on November 18, 1899, and the building was opened officially on October 15, 1902.

The Sayles library is a T-shaped one story granite building fronted by a two story pedimented pavillion. Set off from its surroundings by a granite retaining wall, the library presents a long facade on Summer Street just west of the Pawtucket Post Office. An extremely wide flight of steps leads from the street to the projecting entrance pavillion fronted by four fluted Greek Ionic columns. The simple pediment does not contain the elaborate sculptural infill first proposed by Cram, Goodhue and Fergusson but is ornamented by stone acroteria at the apex and corners. The entrance is an exact copy of the doorway to the Erechtheum in Athens. The portico fronts the central two-story block of the library, from which three slightly lower major wings extend to either side and to the rear.

Along the front, the severity of the wings is relieved by bands of triple windows framed by pilasters and surmounted by panels in high relief showing the progress of civilization in six stages. These panels were executed by Lee Laurie, a student of Augustus St. Gaudens, according to a program evolved in coordination with the architects. The panels are divided into triads depicting ancient and modern civilization. To the right are: (1) Egypt; (2) Greece, with three figures representing

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

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architecture, war and epic poetry; and (3) a combination of Roman and Hebraic civilization centering on the theme of law. To the left are: (1) Latin, where Dante is leading a typical Renaissance figure through the Inferno; (2) Anglo-Saxon, showing King Arthur and Shakespeare as symbols of British power; and (3) Teutonic, represented by the Niebelungenlied of Wotan binding Brunhilde in a magic sleep. All of these phases are preambles to modern democratic civilization which the building as whole was meant to symbolize and foster.

In general, the exterior decoration of the building is shallow in profile and simple in detail. Other than on the main facade, the major windows are battered in shape and surrounded by a complex molding. Throughout, an egg-and-dart molding is used to delineate the capitals of applied pilasters. The roof is a ribbed copper gable and skylights are set in the central block and major projecting wings. Along the cornice line stone lion-head water spouts alternate with a banding of copper anthemions. The pediment of each major projection is distinguished by large carved acroteria at the tops and corners of the pediments. ✓

The interior was organized around a two-story entrance hall from which a reading room extended to the left, a childrens' room to the right, and double-level stacks area to the rear. Smooth Greek Ionic columns, decorated by necking of egg-and-dart and anthemions, copied from the Erechtheum, are used in pairs to screen this central hall from the entrance portico, reading rooms and stacks. The architects created a strongly vertical space illuminated from above, from which the major interior areas can be seen. A plaque, dedicating the library to the memory of Deborah Cook Sayles, is located in the upper level of this space.

One of the innovative features of the Pawtucket Free Library, as originally established, was the admission of children of any age to the building. This guiding principle was embodied in the childrens' room located to the right of the entrance lobby. Simple pilasters and a coffered ceiling with

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Greek key detailing are the architectural embellishments of this room. As originally designed, tables were lined up along the walls and bamboo windsor chairs used for seating. The architects designed standing lamp forms based on archeological combinations of ancient lamp and pedestal shapes. Extending to the left of the entrance lobby, an adult reading room was organized in the same manner.

Emphasizing another characteristic of the Pawtucket Library Association, open stacks with glass floors were placed in a wing projecting to the rear. A mezzanine level allowed double storage on the main floor level; the original plan proposed future expansion of the stacks to the rear. In the corners between the adult reading room wing and the stacks, the architects provided a small reference room and an office for the librarian. On the opposite side, in the corner between the Childrens' Room wing and the stacks, they placed a cataloging room, trustees' room, toilet, and stairway to the basement. A portrait of Deborah Cook Sayles, painted by Kenyon Cox in 1908, hangs in this stairwell. The basement area includes an auditorium, conference room, office space and maintenance facilities.

Between 1962 and 1967, the library trustees undertook a renovation of the building. Under the direction of Millman and Sturgis, architects of Providence, the interior was painted, carpeted, and mezzanine balconies were added in the halves of the children's and adults' reading rooms nearest the central hall. The old children's reading room became a periodicals room and a new children's room created in the lower level of the building. On the exterior, the building was cleaned and repointed, and the mullioned windows were replaced by a single pane of glass. All of the changes have been sympathetic to the original character of the building.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1899 - 1902

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Cram, Goodhue, and Fergusson

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Deborah Cook Sayles Library has been intimately connected with the growth and personality of Pawtucket. That the building was a gift to the city from its first mayor is of no small significance. The structure was designed for a well-established community educational/cultural institution of which Pawtucket was justifiably proud. Incorporated in February, 1852, the Pawtucket Library Association sold stock which enabled it to raise \$1,000 and to purchase the library of the local Freemasons. In 1876, the collection of books became the property of the Town Council which was charged with the operation of the Free Public Library. Progressive from the start, the library was nationally known for initiating the "open shelf" system, for abolishing the age limit for children, and for opening a Sunday reading room so that the city's working industrial populace could be served.

The library was erected during an important period in the history of the city. Pawtucket's importance as the birthplace of American industry dates to 1790 when Samuel Slater arrived in Rhode Island. During the next three years, Slater, under the patronage of Moses Brown of Providence, reconstructed the Arkwright spinning frame and opened the first successful cotton mill in the United States. The mill, now a museum, was constructed on the west banks of the Blackstone River, not far from the future site of the library. Over the following century, Pawtucket saw rapid economic expansion in the textile industry. By the end of the nineteenth century, Pawtucket residents were proud of their position as an industrial center of national importance and eager to erect structures physically expressive of their prosperity. In 1890, the Cotton Centennial was celebrated with extensive festivities and expectations for future progress. The library, begun in the 1890's, represents private recognition of Pawtucket's civic identity and self esteem.

(See Continuation Sheet # 3)

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Grieve, Robert. An Illustrated History of Pawtucket, Central Falls and Vicinity. Pawtucket Gazette, 1897.  
The Deborah Cook Sayles Public Library, Pawtucket, Rhode Island.  
 Providence: Standard Printing Company, 1903  
 Schuyler, Montgomery. "The Works of Cram, Goodhue and Fergusson: A Record of the Firm's Representative Structures, 1892-1910."

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

(See Continuation Sheet #5)

UTM: OK - W N  
12-22-75

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1

UTM REFERENCES

A	19	302050	4638840	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

Keith N. Morgan, Museum Specialist

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

October 2, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

**12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

*Frederick D. Wilkinson*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE October 14, 1975

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Acting

*Christy P. Rogers*

DATE

12/6/75

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST

DATE

DEC 4 1975

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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In addition to the library, the intersection of Summer and High Streets was marked as a community center by the presence of the First Baptist Church (1822) and the Masonic Temple (1895), (both since demolished), and the Pawtucket Post Office (1896-98). Subsequently, the construction of a building for the Salvation Army and another for the Y.M.C.A. have continued the tradition of community service facilities in this area.

The social history of Pawtucket is also represented by this structure. Frederic Sayles' gift of the library building reflects the importance and wealth of the mill owners at the end of the nineteenth century. When eighteen, Sayles began to work in the family business, the Moshassuck Bleachery, of which he was made a partner ten years later. Sayles greatly expanded the family mills and introduced additional power in the form of Corliss steam engines which modernized textile production. The village of Saylesville, with handsome cottages and a small church, grew under his direction and benefaction. The family was well known for philanthropy and when his son, Benjamin, died in 1873 while a student at Brown University, Mr. Sayles built a large auditorium and classroom building for the school in memory of his son. Thus, Sayles' gift of the library was consistent with his personal practices and with the late nineteenth century attitude of private philanthropy.

The speakers at the laying of the cornerstone and the dedication of the building summarized well the significance of this structure for their contemporaries. They emphasized that the public library had become a national institution inferior in importance to only the home, the church, and the school. The library did not function solely as a repository for books. It served as a conservator of good morals, counteracting the influence of the saloon and the street, and as a conservator of good manners. Indeed, the public library was seen as an exponent of democracy, an institution from which no man, woman or child was barred. The admission of children to the library, and special evening and Sunday openings to accommodate the

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mill workers, made these statements particularly justified. On the other hand, the responsibility of private philanthropy for public welfare was equally stressed.

Finally, the library is an excellent example of the architectural environment of the 1890's that continued into the twentieth century. The Columbian Exposition's dictum of classicism may have determined the design of the Pawtucket library. Cram, Goodhue, and Fergusson's choice of a Greek Revival style is highly unusual for this firm which later was one of the strongest proponents of the Gothic Revival. Perhaps the adjacent post office, a typically Beaux Arts composition, influenced their selection of a classical format. Mr. Sayles may also have seen libraries in Europe designed in a classical, if not actually Greek, style. In any event, the building was intended to educate its users in the study of style and taste, and it was assumed that the fitness of its decoration and proportions would exert a positive moral influence upon the citizens of Pawtucket.



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Architectural Record, XXIX (January, 1911), p.20.