

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



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## 1. Name of Property

historic name: Wanskuck Branch, Providence Public Library

other name/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Location

street & number: 233 Veazie Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Providence vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Providence code: 007 zip code: 02904

## 3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: Branch Buildings, Providence Public Library, Providence, RI, 1926-1932

Property name Wanskuck Branch, Prov. Public Library, Providence Cty., RI

**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.

See continuation sheet.

*Frederick Williamson*

1/29/98  
Date

Signature of certifying official

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

     See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register      See continuation sheet.

     determined eligible for the National Register

     See continuation sheet.

     determined not eligible for the National Register

     removed from the National Register

     other (explain):     

*Edson H. Beall*

3-5-98

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic: EDUCATION

Sub: Library

Current: EDUCATION

Sub: Library

Property name Wanskuck Branch, Prov. Public Library, Providence Cty., RI

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification:

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY  
REVIVALS/Colonial Revival

Other Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Materials: foundation BRICK roof Slate  
walls BRICK other \_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A & C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of Significance: EDUCATION  
SOCIAL HISTORY  
ARCHITECTURE

Period(s) of Significance: 1928

Significant Dates: 1928

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: A Howe, Wallis E.  
B Balchin Construction Co.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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## Description

The Wanskuck Branch of the Providence Public Library (PPL) at 245 Veazie Street is a one-story brick structure designed by Wallis E. Howe. Plans of the building incorporate Colonial Revival design details. Measurements of the T-shaped building are 81' 6" x 43' with a 19' x 16' wing at the rear which houses the reference room and stairway to the basement; the lot is 110' x 100'. Large brick chimneys are included at both ends of the gabled roof. This is the first branch built based on Howe's prototype for ten proposed branches of the PPL.

Facing west, the principal elevation is dominated by a projecting gabled entrance porch with wood columns and neo-Federal detail; the pediment contains the seal of the PPL carved in wood and enamelled, bearing the inscription "Enlightenment/Providence Public Library." Pilasters frame the recessed door and its leaded glass fanlight. The five-bay main facade is symmetrically punctuated by four multi-paned windows with transoms and keystones highlighted in limestone. (Vinyl sash has been installed throughout the structure.) A molded brick water table carries around the building separating the main floor from the raised basement. Brick quoins mark each corner. Front and rear elevations are capped by a wood dentil cornice.

The north and south elevations are identical in their composition. They contain multi-paned sash windows flanking the large chimneys. An entrance door to the basement and three symmetrically placed windows similar to those on the north and south elevations (and three in the basement) occupy the rear 16' projection. Three windows on either side of this projection are similar although smaller than those on the main facade and continue the limestone transom and keystone.

The three-part interior plan retains its original configuration and darkly stained woodwork. Stairs in the vestibule lead to side doors which open into the main floor. A central hall/delivery area separates two rooms - the adult reading room to the left and the children's reading room to the right. The librarian's office is defined by wood and glass partitions. Open wood bookshelves line the interior walls of the main floor; shelving capacity is about 12,000. Windows above the bookshelves are a source of natural light. Window seats are situated beneath the two front windows in each reading room; large open (non-functioning) fireplaces with wood surrounds are located on the east and west walls. Wood and glass partitions above bookshelves separate reading rooms from the circulation

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area. The barrel-vault plaster ceiling of the main floor is 20' high. Original light fixtures have been replaced by chandeliers.

The reference room is entered through an open arched doorway. Decorative plasterwork encircles the clock above the arch. Early photographs illustrate that the woodwork, glass and wood partitions, bookshelves, and plaster decoration are original. All wood finishes are stained, as they appear in these photographs.

A door flanking the reference room leads to enclosed interior stairs to the basement. The basement is dominated by a large community room, capable of seating 125 people. There is also a conference room, a storage room capable of holding 10,000 books, a room for the librarians, heating plant, janitor's room, and rest rooms. The basement is simply detailed reflecting its utilitarian function.

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### Photographs

3. Photographer: Jean Douglas
4. Date: March 1994
5. Negative: R.I. Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission  
150 Benefit Street  
Providence, RI 02903

The above information applies to all photographs.

6. View: Facade, view to northeast
7. Photo #1 of 3
  
6. View: South elevation, view to north.
7. Photo #2 of 3
  
6. View: Interior central hall delivery area, view to east.
7. Photo #3 of 3

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### Significance

The branch libraries of the Providence Public Library, including the Wanskuck Branch, are historically significant for their role in the history of education in Providence and for their association with the history of the city's several immigrant communities. In addition, each branch is significant in the city's architectural history as a good example of its building type. Designed by Providence architect Wallis E. Howe and built by the Balchin Construction Company in 1928, the Wanskuck Branch of the Providence Public Library is a one-story Colonial Revival brick building that continues to serve in the capacity of a branch library. Funds for its construction were paid out of the PPL's endowment, the total cost being \$65,806. It occupies a 110' x 100' lot in the northwestern section of Providence. The library retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, and association. It meets the requirements for registration under criteria A and C for its educational and architectural significance as more fully described in the multiple property submission "Branch Buildings of the Providence Public Library, Rhode Island, 1926-1932."

The history of the Wanskuck Branch of the PPL began in 1903 with the original Wanskuck Library at 756 Branch Avenue which was owned and operated by the Wanskuck Mill Company for the exclusive use of mill workers. After seven years the library closed, and the PPL was asked to take over the collection as a branch. On July 5, 1910 the Wanskuck Library reopened as the second branch of the PPL. Its collection of 4,280 volumes consisted of 1,117 volumes from the original Wanskuck Library.

The Wanskuck Branch served an ethnically diverse population of approximately 12,000 borrowers. By the mid-1920s, nearly 11,000 volumes filled a one-room space. The room was described as "crowded and ill-lighted," and "most unattractive in every respect."<sup>1</sup> The branch needed more space, a community room, and the separation of adult and juvenile readers. On February 13, 1925 a petition was presented to the PPL Board of Trustees from 3,760 residents of Wanskuck requesting a library building. References to the crowded conditions may have had an effect on the PPL Trustees. The Board voted that the Secretary acknowledge this

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<sup>1</sup>Clarence E. Sherman, The Service of the Providence Public Library to the Community (Providence, RI: Livermore & Knight Co., 1926), p. 25.

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petition "expressing sympathy with the object, and saying that the PPL is already actively working to that end."<sup>2</sup>

After examination of the district, a 110' x 100' lot was acquired in 1927 adjacent to the Veazie Street School. On November 20, 1928 the new Wanskuck Branch was formally dedicated in the presence of an audience of about 500. This was the first independent PPL building, apart from the central library, built for library purposes. A Neighborhood Advisory Committee was formed in 1935. The Wanskuck Branch closed in July 1981 due to cutbacks in city funding and was reopened in the spring of 1986.

The branch continues a tradition of community outreach and maintains close contact with the schools and the Wanskuck community. Seen as an educational and cultural resource for people of all ages and nationalities in the community, it remains a widely used resource in the north end of Providence. The largely unaltered interior and exterior of the Wanskuck Branch are reminders of its significant historical association.

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<sup>2</sup>Providence (RI) Public Library, Minutes of the Meetings of the Board of Trustees, February 13, 1925. (Mimeographed.)



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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet.

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: Providence Public Library

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>297880</u>	<u>4635900</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description:  See continuation sheet.

Plat 102, Lot 215

Boundary Justification:  See continuation sheet.

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the 1928 Wanskuck Branch Library.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: Jean Douglas, Consultant

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: April, 1997

Street & Number: 79 Rumstick Road Telephone: 401-245-1804

City or Town: Barrington State: RI ZIP: 02806

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### Major Bibliographical References

"Dedication on the New Wanskuck Branch Building." Books for All (December 1928): 402-403.

"In the Library World." The Library Journal (January 1929): 32.  
Providence (Rhode Island) Public Library. Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Trustees 13 February 1925. (Mimeographed.)

Sherman, Clarence E. "A Branch Building Program in Providence." The Library Journal 55 (January 1930): 58-60.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Service of the Providence Public Library to the Community.  
Providence: Livermore & Knight Co., 1926.