

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED MAR 18 1981  
DATE ENTERED APR 27 1981

**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 Curtis Memorial Library

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 175 East Main Street

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Meriden

\_\_ VICINITY OF

5th

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Connecticut

CODE  
09

COUNTY

New Haven

CODE  
009

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input 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 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 Meriden

STREET & NUMBER 142 East Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Meriden

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

CT

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Meriden City Clerk

STREET & NUMBER 142 East Main Street Room 124 City Hall

CITY, TOWN

Meriden

STATE

CT

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE State Register of Historic Places

DATE

1981

\_\_ FEDERAL  STATE \_\_ COUNTY \_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

CT

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input 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

The Curtis Memorial Library is a small Neo-Classical building built 1901-1903 from a design by Richard Williams. It sits up on a knoll quite far back from **East Main Street**, which rises to a plateau at this point. The library is right on the edge between two areas of Meriden: a residential neighborhood to the south and east, one of many impressive 19th-century houses, and an area of large public and institutional buildings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including two brownstone churches, a Queen Anne - Romanesque school, and the Neo-Colonial city hall.

The library has basically a cruciform plan: a central projecting mass with the main entrance, two side wings, and a large ell to the rear. It appears to be but a single story in height, though a high parapet above the cornice conceals a second story. Above the center of the building is a low, copper-covered dome resting upon a short octagonal base. The walls are constructed of Vermont marble, white with dark gray-green veins.

Several marble steps lead up to the entrance, which is set within a recessed portico behind two pilasters and two fluted Ionic columns in antis. These show a pronounced entasis and, like most of the exterior decorative effects, were **inspired by the Erechtheum** at Athens. The moldings from this temple - a band with the anthemion and alternating ball-and-reel and egg-and-dart moldings - are found along the cornice of the porch, termed a loggia by the architect, and are continued into the capitals of the pilasters and columns. The floor of the portico is covered with a simple geometric arrangement of mosaic tiles. It is lighted by two globe-shaped lamps with brass fixtures. The anthemion is repeated in the copper cresting along the base of the dome and also in the caps of the two end chimneys. Window openings are rectangular and unelaborated. There are three narrow windows on each of the wings of the main facade, and three grilles lighting the center of the second story. The main cornice is plain except for the frieze, which has the names of artists and philosophers chiselled in Latin capitals. Additional names are included on tablets set into the parapet above.

The interior is well preserved, with a panelled dado and mosaic floor in the vestibule and pilasters throughout, continuing the moldings found in the porch. In the wings on the first floor are two reading rooms, each with a fireplace of red Numidian marble and a mantelshelf with Greek cresting. In the ell to the rear were the book stacks, but these are being removed as part of a project to convert the building to a cultural center. Stairs to the second floor are just within the entrance. On the upper story beneath the dome is a large assembly room with stage. The dome **rests on Corinthian columns and an entablature patterned after** the Choragic monument of Lysicrates, also at Athens. The ceiling of the dome has its original paint, with Greek decorations, and is lighted by a central skylight. There are several brass memorial plaques within the interior, the most notable of which is a high-relief figure, Amor-Caritas, designed and cast by Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

The conversion of the library to a cultural center has had little effect on the building's external appearance. Handicapped access is provided by a poured concrete inclined ramp to the west rear of the library, thereby preserving the monumentality of the main facade while correcting a serious functional defect.

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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

Curtis Memorial Library  
Meriden, CT

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### Existing Surveys:

Historic Resources Inventory, Meriden, Connecticut

1978 - Local

Meriden Heritage and Cultural Commission  
Meriden, CT

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

## PERIOD

## AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input 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

Built 1901-1903

## BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Richard Williams, architect

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Curtis Memorial Library is an important historic resource because it is a small but representative example of Neo-Classical architecture (Criterion C) and because, as an early 20th-century public library, it is a product of that era's concern for social reform (Criterion A). For many people in the Progressive period, education and the popular diffusion of knowledge were the keys to a host of other reforms, and a great number of public libraries were established during this time to further the goal of enlightening the masses. The first public library in Meriden was established in 1898 by the Thursday Morning Club, a group of socially-prominent women. In 1900, one of their number, Mrs. Augustus Munson Curtis, offered to buy the land and construct a home for the library, which up to this point had but a single reading room in a private home. Mrs. Curtis gave the library as a memorial to her daughter, Agnes, and her husband, George R. Curtis. Mr. Curtis was one of the city's leading industrialists, an officer of the Meriden Britannia Company, and one-time mayor of the city.

The library exemplifies many of the key characteristics of the Neo-Classical style. Although it is small compared with other buildings, it nonetheless conveys a sense of dignity and monumentality. There is both richness and restraint in the flat, unbroken marble wall surfaces; at the same time, there is an academic correctness about the ornamentation, with all the diameters proportioned properly. The concern for order which motivated the Neo-Classicists was in this case more than just a reaction to Victorian excess: the building's classical architecture had a didactic purpose as well. The architect intended the Greek examples, for which he studied measured drawings of the prototypes, to serve as an inspiration for the library's patrons, educate their tastes, "and thus contribute permanently to the advancement of knowledge through the expression of the architecture of the building, in harmony with the treasures of lore which are housed within its walls."<sup>1</sup>

Richard Williams was a New Haven architect active in the period 1900-1925. First in partnership with William H. Allen and later individually, he was one of that city's most prolific designers, a member and frequent exhibitor of the Architectural Club of New Haven. In addition to many Shingle-Style residences, he designed several Neo-Colonial public buildings including the Hamden Town Hall and Milford High School. In this building he displays both a good grounding in Classical precedents, and, in the interior layout, a grasp of the best building principles of his day. For example, the stack area in the rear ell was designed to be fireproof and separated from the rest of the library by steel doors, and the bookshelves were carefully spaced so that light from the skylight and windows would illuminate the aisles. In both its style and function, the design was well-suited for a public library.

Mention must also be made of the tablet by Saint-Gaudens, the foremost American sculptor of his day. Although not one of his major works, the tablet

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Gillespie, C. Bancroft (comp.). A Century of Meriden. Meriden: Journal Publishing Company, 1906.

Meriden Journal, April 20, 1903, p. 1.

Wendover, Sanford H. 150 Years of Meriden. Meriden: City of Meriden, 1956.

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY c. 1

QUADRANGLE NAME Meriden

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24 000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 683700 4600330

B               

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C               

D               

E               

F               

G               

H               

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is Lot 1, Block 113, Map 19, Map District 2, in Meriden Assessor's records and is described in the Land Records, Volume 111, Page 118.

## LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Bruce Clouette, Consultant

ORGANIZATION Connecticut Historical Commission DATE June 26, 1979

STREET & NUMBER 59 South Prospect Street TELEPHONE (203) 566-3005

CITY OR TOWN Hartford STATE CT

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

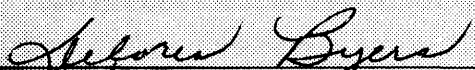
THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL      STATE      LOCAL x

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE 

TITLE Director, Connecticut Historical Commission DATE March 4, 1981

<b>FOR NPS USE ONLY</b>	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
	Entered in the National Register DATE <u>4/27/81</u>
ATTEST: <u>for</u> <b>KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER</b>	DATE
<b>CHIEF OF REGISTRATION</b>	DATE

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is typical of the many portrait and theme reliefs he did for public buildings and employs a figure, Amor-Caritas, used in other, better-known castings. The subject's Classical features, long flowing robes, and lithe figure exemplify the Art Nouveau ideal of beauty. The bronze is an integral part of the building, another testimony to the concern for public access to art which moved philanthropists like Augusta Curtis.

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in C. Bancroft Gillespie (comp.) A Century of Meriden (Meriden, 1906), 52-53. A somewhat different version of the architect's description appeared in the Meriden Journal of April 20, 1903.