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

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC THE ATHENAEUM OF PHILADELPHIA

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION STREET & NUMBER 219 South 6th Street NOT FOR PUBLICATION CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT CITY, TOWN 3rd Philadelphia ____ VICINITY OF COUNTY CODE CODE STATE Pennsylvania 191 Philadelphia CLASSIFICATION CATEGORY **OWNERSHIP** STATUS PRESENT USE __DISTRICT ___PUBLIC XOCCUPIED ___AGRICULTURE XMUSEUM X_BUILDING(S) X_PRIVATE ___UNOCCUPIED ___COMMERCIAL ____PARK ___STRUCTURE ___вотн ----WORK IN PROGRESS X EDUCATIONALPRIVATE RESIDENCE PUBLIC ACQUISITION SITE ACCESSIBLE __ENTERTAINMENT ___RELIGIOUS ___OBJECT __IN PROCESS X_YES: RESTRICTED ___GOVERNMENTSCIENTIFIC ___BEING CONSIDERED ____YES: UNRESTRICTED __INDUSTRIAL -TRANSPORTATION __NO ___MILITARYOTHER: **4 OWNER OF PROPERTY** NAME Board of Trustees, Athenaeum Roger Moss, Librarian (Wa 5-2688) STREET & NUMBER 219 South 6th Street STATE CITY, TOWN Philadelphia Pennsylvania VICINITY OF 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Department of Records STREET & NUMBER City Hall CITY, TOWN STATE Philadelphia Pennsv1vania **6** REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey DATE 1962 X.FEDERAL ___STATE ___COUNTY ___LOCAL DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Library of Congress CITY, TOWN STATE Washington, D.C. 20240



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FAIR	UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

"The Athenaeum of Philadelphia is an outstanding Italian or "Tuscan" style building. After thirty years of sharing quarters with the Philosophical Society. the membership caused a new building to be constructed facing Washington Square, some three hundred yards from Independence Hall. The building was erected in 1845-47 from a design by John Notman following a celebrated architectural competition to which William Strickland, John Haviland, and Thomas U. Walter also submitted designs. Notman's Athenaeum gave America its first major building in the new Italianate Revival Style and one of the first in Philadelphia of brownstone. The diarist Sidney George Fisher recorded when the building opened that it was 'the handsomest edifice in the city,' an opinion shared by architectural historians to modern times. On the National Register of Historic Places, the Athenaeum is considered one of the most significant American buildings of the nineteenth century. It was published widely in other cities and often copied. Severely plain on the exterior and deceptive in scale, the Athenaeum contains principal reading rooms with 24-foot ceilings that were richly embellished with grained woodwork and marbled columns, fine carpets and gas lighting fixtures. Into these spaces has been gathered a notable collection of paintings, statuary and period furniture. The Athenaeum was one of the first institutions to take an active interest in American Empire decorative arts and owns several labelled examples that have been widely published and exhibited.

The Athenaeum remains largely unchanged. Electricity and interior plumbing were introduced in the early twentieth century. This plumbing and wiring, now inconvenient and dangerously out of date, has never been modernized; nor has the building been given a fire stair, elevator, or modern security and fire protection systems. These would allow the Athenaeum to fully admit the public to this architectural treasure while protecting both the fabric of the structure and its growing collections.

During its century and a quarter on Washington Square, the Athenaeum provided space for several other societies that have since gone on to their own buildings: the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the American Institute of Architects (who commissioned Frank Furness to redecorate their room), and the American Catholic Historical Society, to name a few. The Philadelphia Law Library was for many years on the first floor and the National Education Association was founded in the building. The demands of a continually growing collection eventually made such services impossible. Now, the new rare book stacks have been installed and the building has been beautifully refurbished and restored in the last two years."¹

¹Roger Moss.



PERIOD	AF	REAS OF SIGNIFICANCE CH	ECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW	
PREHISTORIC	ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	COMMUNITY PLANNING	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	RELIGION
1400-1499	ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	CONSERVATION	LAW	SCIENCE
1500-1599	AGRICULTURE	ECONOMICS	X LITERATURE	SCULPTURE
1600-1699	X_ARCHITECTURE	X_EDUCATION	MILITARY	SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	ART	ENGINEERING	MUSIC	THEATER
_X1800-1899	COMMERCE	EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	PHILOSOPHY	TRANSPORTATION
1 9 00-	COMMUNICATIONS	INDUSTRY	POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	OTHER (SPECIFY)
		INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1845-1847

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

John Notman

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Athenaeum in Philadelphia is one of the first examples of the Italian palazzo facade in the United States. The winning design in a competition, in which Strickland, Haviland, and Walter all took part, was the work of John Notman (1810-1865). It is probably derived from Sir Charles Barry's Travellers' Club (1829) in London which launched the Renaissance revival movement. Barry also designed the Manchester Athenaeum (1836) and the London Reform Club (1837).

During the 19th century there were many Athenaeums in America--and only a few survive. In Boston, Hartford, New York and Philadelphia they were proprietary libraries for which shares of stock were issued and passed on from generation to generation.

Roger Moss outlines its history:

"The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, named for the classical Greek goddess of wisdom, is a non-profit, educational institution founded in 1814 for 'The purpose of procuring newspapers, pamphlets, books, maps, charts, and of collecting historical and other monuments connected with the history and antiquities of America and the useful arts, and generally to disseminate useful knowledge." The Athenaeum was spawned by the cultural and literary nationalism of the early nineteenth century and developed out of the American Philosophical Society with which it shared quarters on Independence Square until 1847. Among its founders were Chief Justice William Tilghman, Nicholas Biddle, Benjamin Chew, Jr., the publisher Mathew Carey, Peter Stephen DuPonceau, Joseph Hopkinson and the educator-philanthropist Roberts Vaux. As its collections expanded, and other learned societies were founded to assume various parts of this omnibus purpose (the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the Franklin Institute both grew out of the Athenaeum's membership), the Athenaeum refined its objectives. Today it maintains 'a reference library for members and the public, a depository of rare books and periodicals of interest to scholars,' while joining actively 'in the cultural life of Philadelphia by participation in historical and educational activities and in the recognition of outstanding literary achievement.'

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

10GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____ less than one acre UTM REFERENCES

A 1, 8 4 8, 7 0,4,0 4,4 2,1 6,4,0 ZONE EASTING NORTHING	BL LI

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The national historic landmark boundary is coterminous with the legal boundary of the property. The entire property is 126 feet in length, beginning at 6th Street. The building lot is 51 feet wide, while the garden lot to the rear of it is slightly wider--53 feet, 6-1/2 inches.

STATE	CODE	COUNTY		CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY		CODE
FORM PREPARE	D BY			
NAME / TITLE				
Carolyn Pitts, Arch	<u>itectural Historia</u>	n		
ORGANIZATION		- ·	DATE	
Historic Sites Surv	ey, National Park	Service	7-29-76	
1100 L Street, N.W.			TELEPHONE	
CITY OR TOWN			202-523- STATE	5464
Washington, D.C. 20	240			
STATE HISTORI		N OFFICER	CERTIFICAT	ION
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The Athenaeum	of	Philadelphia			
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John Marion gives a rather poetic description:

"There are few libraries like it anywhere. Immediately upon entering, the visitor is struck by its air of serenity. The entrance hall with its Empire furniture helps give it this special aura--an elegant pier table, a lovely old mirror with a charming scene in gold leaf (a sentry guarding an ancient fort), the chairs with the ever-present golden bee on the green background, a copy in marble of Canova's reclining nude of Pauline Bonaparte, Napoleon's infamous sister. Three handsome portraits by John Neagle (1796-1865) are outstanding as are a splendid Empire desk attributed to Michel Bouvier and thought to have been in Joseph Bonaparte's home, and a pair of chairs that was known to have been. A gold escutcheon from the state coach which bore Napoleon to his coronation on December 2, 1804, has found its way here, too, and a charming watercolor of a noblewoman attributed to Princess Charlotte, Joseph Bonaparte's daughter.

At the first floor rear, overlooking an intimate garden, is the circulation room, Not only are there books everywhere, but a Neagle of Mrs. Julia Wood as Amina in La Sonnambula and, as an extra fillip, a tray with sherry decanter and glasses!

The staircase with its square skylight on the roof leads to the two spacious rooms on the second floor--the old reading room overlooking the garden and the old reference room facing Washington Square. Here the past and the present meet in a way of which Henry James would have approved. Pause a moment to contemplate the island of repose which is Washington Square, or stand on the theatrical iron balcony shrouded in wisteria and let your thoughts wander back more than a century to the time when the garden was first laid out. Archeologists have located the foundations of part of the Walnut Street Prison beneath it."²

The exterior is three stories high, formal and symmetrical in the measured distribution of its features, with a rusticated ground floor, smooth-surfaced walls with quoined corners in the upper portions, and with a very large

²John Marion. Bicentennial City. Pyne Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1974, pp.70-71.

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The Atheneaum o	f Philadelphia			
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crowning cornice (this made of wood), the building captures the spirit of central Italian palace fronts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. There is a suggestion of the Massimi Palace in Rome in the simply framed windows of the top story and the tall ones with cornices on ancones (scrolled brackets) of the main floor. Here above the entrance runs a continuous stone balcony on heavy brackets.

Reacting against what was now regarded as the monotony of Greek designs, "market-house, cottage, bank, town-hall, law-school, church, brewery, and theatre . . . are all the same", Notman's generation welcomed the fresh opportunities for experiment inherent in this new style. Not the least of its attractions was that being "astylar," without columns, it dispensed with the cumbersome and needless orders that had been the stock in trade of the classicist. This was to commend it especially to the designer of facades within the narrow frontage of urban lots.

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In 1968 the Athenaeum joined with the Victorian Society in America, whose offices are in the Athenaeum's building, to offer a national program of research, publications and public lectures, tours and exhibitions devoted to nineteenth century American social and cultural history. This program has attracted scholars from all parts of the country to utilize the heretofore largely unknown rare book collections of the Athenaeum developed over the last 160 years. It has also attracted substantial new collections; in the past four years alone some one thousand architectural drawings, seven thousand photographs and several thousand rare books and manuscripts valued at nearly \$1,000,000 have been added to the materials that are made available without charge to all qualified scholars studying the last century."

the The building was one of first brownstones and probably helped create the vogue for the material. The Athenaeum still utilizes some of the first floor for offices, but the great stairwell and two large second floor chambers have been fully restored to their original beauty.

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PAGE

Photographs and Their Descriptions

Location: Athenaeum, Philadelphia, Pa.

Photo credit: The Anthenaeum

- Photos: 1. John Noyman's Final Design as built, 1845
 - 2. Vestibule
 - 3. Grand Stair
 - 4. News Room, Second floor front
 - 5. Main Reading Room, Second floor rear