

Alexandria Memorial Public Library (Memorial Free Library) HABS No. PA-5414  
Main Street  
Alexandria  
Huntingdon County  
Pennsylvania

HABS  
PA,  
31-ALEX,  
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ALEXANDRIA MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY  
(Memorial Free Library)

HABS No. PA-5414

Location: The building is located on the northeast corner of Hartslog and Main streets, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Alexandria Memorial Library Inc., a private endowment.

Present Use: Library.

Significance: The Alexandria Memorial Public Library is one of the most formal and high-style buildings in town. Two of Alexandria's leading citizens and philanthropists, William Woolverton and William Thompson, donated it to Alexandria, though it served as the first such facility in the three counties of Huntingdon, Blair and Bedford. This is the only library donated to any community in Huntingdon County, a precept modeled after the library-building program of Andrew Carnegie. The building, a good example of turn-of-the-century civic architecture, is rivaled in size only by the Presbyterian Church.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1899-1901.
2. Architect: Frederick James Shollar (1874-1960). Shollar, a prominent Altoona-based designer who appears in that city's directories in 1896 (alone); 1904, 1914 (Shollar & Hersh); 1917 (alone); 1925, 1927, 1930 (Hersh & Shollar); 1936, 1939 (alone); and 1941 (with W.G. Shollar). He was a protege of Charles M. Robinson of Altoona in 1887, and three years later he opened an office with Frank Hersh, a partnership that continued, on and off well into the twentieth century. Shollar is credited with helping to establish Altoona's city planning commission, chairing it for six years; with Hersh he is credited with introducing the Classical Revival to that city. Among his other commissions are the Altoona Trust Company building, Rothert Building, city hall and the Shriner's Jaffa Mosque--all in Altoona (Mirror).
3. Original and subsequent owners: The lot, including landscaping, fronts on Main Street, and extends north 200' to an alley. The privately run library is administered by a board of trustees and a self-perpetuating endowment.
4. Builder: J.C. Hall of Huntingdon built the library at a cost of \$16,000.
5. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been found. The library has not been significantly altered since its construction, except for use of the upstairs space. The second floor was originally an

auditorium used for plays, lectures, and other social and civic events. Its 200 seats faced the stage area on the north wall.

6. Alterations and additions: Fans were installed in the ceilings of both the first and second floors in summer 1988. The auditorium interior was remodeled into a museum in 1975, at which time the seats were removed. The velvet curtain and footlights also have been removed. (Harshbarger, pamphlet, October 13, 1979) The stage is intact, as are the flanking dressing rooms. The building's original lighting was powered by acetylene gas, manufactured in a small brick outbuilding which stood until recently; the power is now electric.

- B. Historical Context: Established in the same philanthropic spirit as industrialist Andrew Carnegie's endowment of local libraries, the Alexandria Public Library of Alexandria--and a \$30,000 endowment for maintenance and new books--was built for the use of borough citizens by two cousins who had spent part of their childhoods in Alexandria: William Thompson (1823-1921) and William Woolverton (1842-1914). On October 10, 1900, the building was dedicated to their mothers, Eliza (Stewart) Thompson and Anna Maria (Stewart) Woolverton-Kinsloe, respectively.

Thompson was the son of Reverend James Thompson, minister of the Alexandria Presbyterian congregation from 1819 to 1830, and Eliza Stewart Thompson, granddaughter of Alexandria's founder, Elizabeth Gemmill. He eventually made a fortune in the early oil development of western Pennsylvania; he organized and served as president of the Oil City Savings Bank, and was director of the Centennial Bank of Philadelphia. Thompson owned considerable property in the Alexandria area, including a summer residence. Among other philanthropic activities he remodeled the facade of the Presbyterian Church, founded and equipped the borough's Thompson (fire-fighting) Hose Company, and supported various charities (Harshbarger, 77-78).

Woolverton was involved with the Pennsylvania Railroad in a number of capacities until 1872 when he moved to New York City. There he became a director, and later president, of the New York Transfer and Dodds Express Company, as well as president of the Bell Telephone company of New York. In 1899 Woolverton purchased a farm just beyond the eastern edge of Alexandria, where he built a summer estate called "Dorfgrenze (later, Hartslog) Farm" (Harshbarger, 77). Woolverton's great-grandmother was also Elizabeth Gemmill.

The Alexandria library stands on three lots: two double dwellings and a single house were torn down to accommodate it. Total cost of construction, furnishings, and the initial 2,000 books was \$20,000. The auditorium was the site of many community gatherings, particularly secular ones, such as plays, poetry readings, minstrel shows, concerts, local talent shows, and graduation exercises.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The library represents high-style NeoRenaissance design and is one of the most formal buildings in Alexandria. The main facade boasts

a wide denticulated entablature at the roof and a secondary beltcourse at the second floor, brick quoins on the first-floor corners, and a full-height cross-gable entry porch with a decorated pediment.

2. Condition of fabric: Very good, although the entry porch is damaged and the plaster is failing.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 51' x 75'.
2. Foundations: The cut-stone foundation is topped by a 1' beltcourse of concrete.
3. Wall construction: Brick laid in running-bond courses; the walls are approximately 1' thick. A molded beltcourse separates the first and second stories, and the corners of the first story feature eight rusticated brick quoins.
4. Structural system, framing: Probably steel frame with exterior load-bearing masonry.
5. Porches: The library features a full-height, pedimented entry porch; its recessed floor is patterned brick; and six central concrete steps lead upto the porch. Above the decorated arch surround that features a keystone, are two sculpted medallions on a recessed panel: the west medallion reads "AD," the east medallion, "1899." "MEMORIAL PUBLIC LIBRARY" is inscribed on the frieze.
6. Chimneys: There are two interior brick chimneys near the south gable end. On the interior, the fireplace in the west section of the first floor is free standing. There may have been a matching, symmetrically placed fireplace in the librarian's office at the east end of the building, but now there is only a protrusion where the firebox would have been.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The front door consists of two pairs of double wood doors, each with five horizontal panels; these are topped by a large transom with six decorated lights, and sidelights flank each set of the doors. Modern glazing has been installed in the arched opening above the transom. The five-paneled wood doors on the east and south sides of the building are located about 20' from the north wall.
  - b. Windows: The windows are of various design. Paired triple-light verticals topped by an ornamented multi-light transom are centered on the interior bays of each facade. Elliptical windows with ornamental glazing punctuate the ends of the second-story facades, below which are arched window openings.

8. Roof:
- a. Shape, covering: Hipped roof with central cross-gable on the west and east facades, and a gabled front entry porch. At least part of the roof is covered with sheet metal.
  - b. Cornice: A full entablature is composed of wood, with a double row of dentils, plain frieze, and architrave.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
  - a. First floor: The full-width entrance hall is about 10' deep and contains symmetrical open-welled stairways that have independent landings and climb to meet at the second floor. The main library room is beyond two double glass doors, and occupies the full length of the building. The interior is divided into a check-out area and librarian's office, using solid walls, decorated wood columns (probably masking the steel frame supports), segmental-arches and open arcades. The northwest fireplace is free-standing, with the firebox opening south. Two small, rear stairways run along the east and west walls north, to exits on the respective facades.
  - b. Second floor: Access is gained by the east and west stairways approaching from the sides. Two solid wood double doors are set into angled walls. The auditorium is one large room with an enclosed stairway leading south along the rear portion of the east wall, up to an enclosed platform that extends about 12' from the south wall and 10' from the east wall. The stage on the north wall is flanked by two doors that lead into the backstage area, two small dressing rooms, and the stairways to the first floor.
2. Stairways: The entryway stairs on the east and west walls are half-turn with landings, rising along the south wall of the entryway. Thirteen treads rise from the floor to the landing, and eleven treads lead from the landing to the second floor. Wood panels decorate the string below each tread. The squared newel post is flat with modest egg-and-dart and bead-and-reel carvings. The two wood stairways on the rear east and west walls lead to a landing on the north wall and take a quarter-turn; the first section is open-welled, the area above the landing is closed. Approximately 2-1/2' wide and 4' long, its newel post features an urn and carved detailing around the top base is a simpler version of that on the entryway stair newel posts--a line of egg and dart, and on the corners of the post, a bead-and-reel line down to the base.
3. Flooring: Modern carpeting obscures most of the first floor; the entryway is

linoleum. The second floor is wood plank.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls are plastered. Dark, stained wood is used for support columns, door, and window trim, approximately 1' base molding, and to mask the steel infrastructure.
5. Doorways and doors: Double doors lead from the entry to the main room on the first floor, with four panels on the lower section and glazing above. The doors at the top of the rear stairs are five-paneled wood. The three double doors between the auditorium space and hall on the second-floor are solid wood, over which are arched transoms.
6. Decorative features: Much of the original hardware remains, such as door handles and shelving on the west section of the south wall. The original furniture features the bead-and-reel motif, and the diamond pattern in the columns are repeated in the woodwork of the window transoms. The fireplace surround is rusticated and molded brick.
7. Lighting fixtures: Three of the original gas wall fixtures are in the museum and one is in the small, first-floor kitchen. The lighting is now electric.
8. Heating: Oil.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The library is situated in the center of Alexandria on Main Street. The Bank of Alexandria was constructed across the street in the 1920s. The businesses that intermingled with the houses along Main Street are now used as dwellings, so the area is predominantly residential.
2. Landscaping, enclosures: A wide lawn east of the building is the site of a war memorial stone encircled by small flags. A stone commemorates the spot where John Hart, the Indian Trader believed to have been the first white man to stop at the Alexandria area. Trees and bushes surround all but the north side of the building. At one time an iron rail fence surrounded the building, or at least its front "yard," and a sidewalk led to both side doors.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Old views (in Hartslog Heritage, 3, 69, 76-77, 82, 88, 97). The Alexandria museum has several historical photographs.
- B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

Measel, Sara Keith. "The History of the Memorial Public Library and Its Donors." Term Paper, completed for History of U.S. and Pennsylvania II, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, July 28, 1971.

C. Secondary and published sources:

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

F.J. Shollar obituary, (Altoona, Pennsylvania) Mirror (16 January, 1960).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).