

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Florence Public Library  
other names/site number Florence County Public Library

**2. Location**

street & number 319 South Irby Street not for publication  
city or town Florence vicinity  
state South Carolina code SC county Florence code 041 zip code 29501

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mary W. Edmonds, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, S.C. Dept. of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C.  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.		
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.		
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain):		



Florence Public Library  
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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- a owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- b removed from its original location.
- c a birthplace or a grave.
- d a cemetery.
- e a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- f a commemorative property.
- g less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
Education

**Period of Significance**

1925-1955

**Significant Dates**

1925

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Wilkins & Hopkins (Architects)  
Haynesworth & Stuckey (Contractors)

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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

Name of repository:

The Drs. Bruce and Lee Foundation  
Florence County Public Library,  
Florence, S.C.





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The Florence Public Library, built in 1925 at the northwest corner of the intersection of South Irby and West Pine Streets, in the city of Florence, South Carolina, is a two-story-over-raised-basement, T-shaped brick veneered building with a concrete foundation, reinforced concrete walls, limestone decorative elements, and a standing seam metal roof.

**EXTERIOR**

The building has a partially subterranean basement story with paired double-hung windows that still feature their scrolled iron grilles. The basement is set beneath a broad pulvinated or convex cast stone water table, while the main story [piano nobile] is dominated by large paired windows with brick and stone surrounded arched transoms. The three-part façade, on South Irby Street, features a projecting central entrance pavilion that is accessed by a broad, monumental brick stair with wide cheek walls containing capstones that extend from the building's water table. At either side of and beneath the entry stair are steps and arched portals leading to the original basement entry.

The entrance portal is dominated by a monumental circular-headed, molded limestone arch accentuated with a keystone and simple medallions at regularly spaced intervals. This arch is vertically subdivided by three inset rectangular wood panels, with a circular-headed twelve-light fixed transom set within a narrow inner circular-headed wooden arched mullion. Between the arched mullion and the larger stone arch is a circular double row of fixed lights between the outer stone arch and the entrance surround. When built in 1925 the entrance below the rectangular wooden panels featured large double-leaf doors flanked with sidelights consisting of two vertical rows of seven lights each; the double doors were replaced with two three-by-seven fixed light windows in 1977-78, when the main library entrance was reoriented to the addition on the original rear elevation. Two cast stone rosettes are located at either side of the keystone near the upper corner of the projecting entry bay. A brick and cast stone entablature surrounds the building and features an unadorned brick frieze. A cast stone label/tablet with flanking cast stone festoons adorns the frieze of the projecting bay, and reads FLORENCE PVBLIC LIBRARY. The building's entire roofline is finished with a brick and cast stone parapet, while the projecting entry bay is topped by a pedimented brick gable featuring a central cast stone cartouche. A flagpole is mounted behind the peak of the gable.

Eight large circular-headed, twenty-four-light fixed paired windows, each surmounted by fanlight transoms of four fixed lights, are a prominent feature of the façade and of both the south and north elevations—two on each side of the entrance bay on the façade and two each on the front portion of the south and north elevations. Originally, these windows were paired twelve-over-twelve light, double-hung sash with arched transoms/fanlights that featured arched tracery that corresponded visually with the window sash. Their arch surrounds feature three decorative brick bands and a brick reveal, cast stone impost blocks and keystones. A third arched bay on the front portion of the south

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and north elevations is of equal size and treatment to that of the windows, but is a brick-filled blind arch and original to the building.

Rectangular cast stone tablets above the windows feature the surnames of ten prominent American authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: PAGE [Thomas Nelson Page, 1853-1922], HARRIS [Joel Chandler Harris, 1849-1908], TIMROD [Henry Timrod, 1828-1867], HAWTHORNE [Nathaniel Hawthorne, 1804-1864], BRYANT [William Cullen Bryant, 1794-1878], COOPER [James Fenimore Cooper, 1789-1851], LANIER [Sidney Lanier, 1842-1881], HAYNE [Paul Hamilton Hayne, 1830-1866], POE [Edgar Allan Poe, 1809-1849], and SIMMS [William Gilmore Simms, 1806-1870]. Most of these authors were Southerners, three—Henry Timrod, Paul Hamilton Hayne, and William Gilmore Simms—were native South Carolinians, and one—Timrod—lived and taught school in Florence just before the Civil War.

Simple circular medallions flank each name on the tablets, and decorative square cast stone medallions diagonally subdivided into equilateral triangles flank each tablet.

The south and north [side] elevations of the three-story rear auditorium wing feature four large circular-headed, tripartite, fixed light windows, in the Diocletian or Palladian form and configuration, separated into a central section of nine lights above and eighteen lights below, flanked by sections with two lights above and twelve lights below.

## INTERIOR

### SECOND (MAIN) FLOOR

The second floor was designed for the main reading rooms and stack room, or book room. Visitors entered by way of a vestibule measuring twenty feet wide and seven feet, eight inches deep. One of the bronze plaques in the vestibule reads: "This building is erected on the site of the home of General W.W. Harlee; Lawyer, Builder and First President of the Wilmington and Manchester R.R. and one of the Founders of the City of Florence for whose daughter the City was named." The other bronze plaque acknowledges the chair and members of the Florence Board of School Commissioners, architects Wilkins and Hopkins, and contractors Haynesworth and Stuckey.

The vestibule opens into a large lobby, twenty feet square, which was originally flanked by large reading rooms, each thirty-two feet, seven inches wide and twenty-one feet, ten inches deep. Each reading room features vaulted ceilings with massive arches; elaborate square columnal pillars featuring panels and egg-and-dart decorated capitals; balconies; walls decorated with panels and moldings; and two large circular-headed windows on each of the front and outer walls.

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A delivery hall behind the lobby and the reading rooms contained stairways to the third floor, with the landing on a mezzanine. The large stack room, or book room, thirty-nine feet, eleven inches wide by sixty feet, six inches deep, forms the shaft of the "T", and is centrally located behind the entrance. It was originally flanked by matching rooms sixteen feet wide by ten feet deep, one serving as the librarian's office and the other serving as a bindery.

**THIRD FLOOR**

The third floor included the upper portions of the reading rooms, with a balcony over the vestibule and another balcony over the delivery hall. The main feature of this floor is the auditorium, forty feet wide and sixty feet, four inches deep, with a seating capacity of 400, a stage, and two dressing rooms. It was originally flanked by matching rooms, sixteen feet, four inches square, one serving as the library's board room and the other serving as an anteroom for the auditorium.

**FIRST (BASEMENT) FLOOR**

The first or basement floor originally contained a children's library, social room or women's parlor, dining room, kitchen and pantry, committee room, boiler and fuel room, and janitor's room. The basement lobby, children's library, and social room corresponded to the second floor lobby and main reading rooms, with the basement lobby twenty square and the children's library and social room each thirty-two feet, seven inches wide and twenty-one, ten inches deep. The dining room was twenty-six feet, ten inches wide and sixty deep.

**ALTERATIONS**

In 1977-78 the Florence County Public Library built a large one-story expansion and made extensive renovations to the original 1925 building. The expansion wrapped the historic building on three sides and the façade entrance was closed, with its doors converted to windows. This expansion, by architect James Paul Barnes, incorporated the exterior rear walls of the historic building as interior walls on portions of three sides. Skylights and open areas connected the historic building and the expansion. These renovations enclosed the stairways as well. Future plans are for the 1977-78 expansion to be removed and for major renovations to the historic building as part of a rehabilitation project by Florence County.

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The Florence Public Library, built in 1925, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its significance under Criterion A as the first truly public library in Florence, the county seat of Florence County, and also under Criterion C as a fine example of Neo-Classical Revival architecture with Beaux Arts influences (sometimes called Beaux-Arts Classicism) of the first quarter of the twentieth century.

The first library in Florence grew out of the practice of Florence attorney Belton O’Neill Townsend, who occasionally lent colleagues and friends books out of his law office as early as the 1870s. In 1903 the Florence Civic Improvement Society, founded the previous year with Mrs. B.G. Gregg as its president, established a town library in City Hall on Evans Street. Miss Florence Harllee (1848-1927)—daughter of William Wallace Harllee (1812-1897), president of the Wilmington and Manchester Railroad, and the person for whom the city was named—served as librarian. Not truly a public library, it was restricted to patrons with a “membership ticket.”<sup>1</sup>

Henry Edwards Davis (1879-1966), a Williamsburg County native, prominent Florence attorney and member of the Florence Board of School Commissioners, was an early advocate of a public library in Florence and took the lead in generating public support for and raising funds for this library. Davis was a 1902 graduate of Presbyterian College and 1904 graduate of the University of South Carolina School of Law. After law school Davis had spent two years studying and practicing law in nearby Marion, the county seat of Marion County, under Judge Charles A. Woods (1852-1925), then a justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court and later a United States Circuit Judge. He was influenced by Woods’s leading role in establishing the Marion County Public Library—the first truly public library in the state—and in encouraging the founding of public libraries throughout South Carolina. Davis was a lawyer in the Florence firm of Willcox and Willcox when he was elected to the Board of School Commissioners in 1917. As early as 1920 he urged the funding and construction of a public library in Florence to honor the veterans of the World War.<sup>2</sup>

In his capacity as Florence city attorney Davis drafted and helped ensure the passage of legislation amending the charter of the Florence School District No. 1 to allow that board to “accept and establish upon such terms as they deem right any public library or libraries . . . managed and controlled by said Board of School Commissioners,” and to hold a special election on the question of whether or not to authorize a three mill tax in the district to build the library. The proposal authorizing a tax of \$50,000 passed in May 1923, and a library board was elected to oversee the design and

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<sup>1</sup> Estellene P. Walker, *“So Good and Necessary a Work”: The Public Library in South Carolina, 1698-1980* (Columbia: The South Carolina State Library, 1981); G. Wayne King, *Rise Up So Early: A History of Florence County, South Carolina* (Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Company, 1981), p. 293.

<sup>2</sup> Walker; Yates Snowden, *History of South Carolina, Volume V: Biographical* (Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1920), p. 45; David Duncan Wallace, *The History of South Carolina: Biographical Volume* (New York: The American Historical Society, 1935), pp. 252-53.

construction of a new Florence Public Library.

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As plans developed, the estimated cost was assessed at about \$120,000, consisting of \$20,000 for the site; \$80,000 for the library itself; \$10,000 for furnishings; and \$10,000 for its first 1,000 books. Henry E. Davis helped secure an additional loan from a Florence bank and supervised the selection of a core collection of books, inclusive of the impressive Senator Samuel A. Graham Collection of rare books and Americana from lower Williamsburg County, South Carolina.<sup>3</sup>

The library is also significant as a design by the Florence architectural firm of Wilkins and Hopkins, with William J. Wilkins and Frank V. Hopkins as its principals. Wilkins began his career as a contractor and builder, served as inspector of buildings in Florence in 1900; he was the contractor for several major buildings in Florence and other communities in the Pee Dee region of the state, such as the Florence City Hall and Opera House (1900); the Darlington City Hall and Opera House (1904); and the Murchison School, in Bennettsville (1902). His first commission as an architect was for the Poyner School in Florence (1904-06, listed in the National Register of Historic Places 19 May 1983), soon followed by commissions for schools in Cheraw (1914 and 1923), Lake City (1923), and Marion (1923); and for the Park School (1915), the "Colored" School (1916), and Florence High School (1919-1920), all in Florence. Frank V. Hopkins joined Wilkins in 1924 and practiced with him until Wilkins's death in 1932. Other major commissions for Wilkins and Hopkins included schools in Hartsville (1925), Florence (1927), Myrtle Beach (1927), Conway (1928), and Cheraw (1928); and one of the firm's last designs, the Florence Masonic Temple (1932).<sup>4</sup>

When the library opened at last on the evening of November 4, 1925, the editors of the *Florence Morning News Review* exulted, "years of individual and collective effort on the part of public-spirited men and women in Florence culminated in a brilliant success last night. . . . That Florence's public library is so handsome, so complete and so thoroughly fills the purposes for which it was designed appeared to be a surprise even to many who have followed the course of events leading to its selection." Dr. John E. White, president of Anderson College, was the main speaker at the dedication ceremonies, commenting, "any college president in the state would crawl a mile to have such a library on his campus."<sup>5</sup>

Another contemporary description, this one by John W. Moore, Florence County Superintendent of Schools, called the Florence Public Library "a community building in the best sense, and not merely a depository for books," while the Florence Chamber of Commerce prominently featured the new library in a pamphlet promoting Florence as "the city of possibilities in the land of opportunity" and

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<sup>3</sup> John W. Moore, "The Florence Public Library," *South Carolina Education* (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Education) 7:3 (December 1925); Wallace, p. 253.

<sup>4</sup> John E. Wells and Robert E. Dalton, *The South Carolina Architects, 1885-1935: A Biographical Dictionary* (Richmond: New South Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 206-08.

<sup>5</sup> "Florence Public Library Opens," *Florence Morning News Review* (Florence, S.C.), 5 November 1925.

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claimed, in a caption accompanying a photograph that it was not only “one of the South’s Most Beautiful Libraries” but also “the only one built and maintained by local people.”<sup>6</sup>

SOURCES

- “Florence Public Library Opens.” *Florence Morning News Review* (Florence, S.C.), 5 November 1925.
- King, G. Wayne. *Rise Up So Early: A History of Florence County, South Carolina*. Spartanburg, S.C.: The Reprint Company, 1981.
- Moore, John W. “The Florence Public Library.” *South Carolina Education* 7:3 (December 1925).
- Snowden, Yates. *History of South Carolina, Volume V: Biographical*. Chicago and New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1920.
- Walker, Estellene P. “So Good and Necessary a Work”: *The Public Library in South Carolina, 1698-1980*. Columbia: The South Carolina State Library, 1981.
- Wallace, David Duncan. *The History of South Carolina: Biographical Volume*. New York: The American Historical Society, 1935.
- Wells, John E., and Robert E. Dalton. *The South Carolina Architects, 1885-1935: A Biographical Dictionary*. Richmond: New South Architectural Press, 1992.

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<sup>6</sup> Moore, “The Florence Public Library;” Florence Chamber of Commerce, undated pamphlet, quoted in King, p. 322.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is shown as the black line marked "Florence Public Library" on the accompanying portion of Florence County Tax Map 90-088, Parcel 8, Lots 3, 4, and 5, drawn at a scale of 1" = 100', showing the property listed in Florence County Deed Book 45, Page 740.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is restricted to the historic building and additions and the city lot on which it is situated.

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The following information is the same for each of the photographs:

Name of Property: Florence Public Library  
Location of Property: 319 South Irby Street, Florence  
Florence County, S.C.

Name of Photographer: P.J. Pebworth  
Date of Photographs: April 2004  
Location of Original Negatives: S.C. Department of Archives and History, Columbia, S.C.

1. Facade right oblique view
2. Facade
3. Left elevation
4. Right elevation
5. Right elevation detail
6. Facade, central entrance detail
7. Facade, detail of frieze over central entrance
8. Facade detail of windows and stone tablets
9. Left elevation detail of windows and stone tablets
10. Vaulted ceilings in Reading Room
11. Vaulted ceilings in Reading Room
12. Interior view of window over central entrance
13. Vaulted ceilings and columns in Reading Room
14. Vaulted ceilings and columns in Reading Room
15. Interior view of central entrance, Lobby and Reading Room
16. Detail of vaulted ceilings in Lobby
17. Detail of column in Reading Room
18. Detail of ceiling molding in Reading Room
19. Detail of ceiling medallion in Lobby
20. Detail of plaster decoration in Lobby