

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 Norman Public Library

other names/site number Senior Citizens Building

=====

2. Location

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street & number 329 South Peters Avenue not for publication N/A
city or town Norman vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code OK county Cleveland code 027
zip code 73070

=====
3. State/Federal Agency Certification
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide X locally. (N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO

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

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4. National Park Service Certification
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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): _____

Signature of Keeper Date
of Action

=====
6. Function or Use
=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: library

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: SOCIAL Sub: clubhouse

=====
7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Italian Renaissance

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
roof ASPHALT
walls BRICK

other _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

=====
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)

Education
Architecture

Period of Significance 1929 - 1950

=====
8. Statement of Significance (Continued)
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Significant Dates 1929

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Hawk and Parr, architect
Barbour and Short, builder

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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(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: _____

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>14</u>	<u>642010</u>	<u>3898250</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
2	<u>N/A</u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

N/A See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian, for City of Norman

organization Savage Consulting date March 2000

street & number Rt. 1, Box 116 telephone 405/459-6200

city or town Pocasset state OK zip code 73079

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Additional Documentation
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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====
Property Owner
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Norman; The Honorable Bob Thompson, Mayor

street & number P.O. Box 370 telephone _____

city or town Norman state OK zip code 73070

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SUMMARY

The Norman Public Library, located in Norman, Oklahoma, is a blond brick, above grade, one-story, building with a raised basement and low pitched, asphalt covered, flat topped, hipped roof. Designed by the Oklahoma City architectural firm of Hawk and Parr, the building is an excellent representation of the Italian Renaissance style. The arched windows are sixteen pane casement with metal frames and six-light fanlights. The majority of first floor windows have metal awnings which obscure the fanlights. The doors have been replaced with the front door being a paneled, metal and glass and the side door being metal slab. The facade is highlighted by a large brick parapet with a concrete cap. Centered within the parapet is a concrete arch which contains the main entry and many decorative concrete details. Encircling the building is a concrete beltcourse between the floors and a concrete band along the arch of the first floor windows. Minor alterations to the building consist of replacing the doors, the addition of a railing to the front stairs, painting of the back elevation and the construction of a small wood fence at the rear of the building. Of more consequence is the construction of two additions at the back of the building. The replacement of the doors, the addition of the stair railing, the painting of the rear elevation and the small wood fence at the back are minor changes which do not significantly impact the integrity of the building. The additions on the rear, constructed in 1977 and 1980, have a more serious impact on the building. However, although the combined, flat roofed addition is relatively large and is built of a similar blond brick, it is easily distinguished from the original building by its minimal style. Further, the addition is narrowly attached to the original building by a connecting brick and glass walkway, giving it the appearance of a separate building. The addition does not cover the entire rear elevation of the building, nor does it impact the remaining elevations of the original building. As such, the original design of the Norman Public Library remains evident.

The Norman Public Library is located on the south fringe of downtown Norman. When constructed, the building was situated in a more residential setting. Still evident to the south of the building is the early twentieth century neighborhood which once surrounded the building. Currently, the building is surrounded by modern office buildings with the June Benson Park being located

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across the street to the south. One block north of the Norman Public Library is the Art Deco style, Cleveland County Courthouse, built in 1939. Overall, the Norman Public Library retains its integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The Norman Public Library is an above-grade one-story building with a raised basement. This design was standard to libraries constructed in the first part of the twentieth century. The practical design allowed for ample space for library and community functions. The foundation, barely visible in areas due to vegetation, is concrete. The hipped roof has a flat top and is covered with asphalt shingles. The roof has broad, boxed eaves with barely visible rafters. The building is located on a nicely landscaped lot, with abundant foliage at the front of the building. The facade of the building fronts onto Peters Avenue. The north elevation faces an alleyway and parking lot and the east elevation also faces onto a parking lot. South of the building is Symmes Street and across the street is the small, modern June Benson Park.

The facade of the Norman Public Library faces west. The several large trees located to the front of the building obscure the view of the facade. The symmetrical facade can be divided into three sections: a narrow, projecting central pavillion containing the entry and two equal flanking sections. The flanking sections of the facade contain three windows on both floors. The basement windows consist of metal framed, twelve light casement windows. The basement windows, like the first floor windows, have simple concrete sills. The first floor windows are metal framed, sixteen pane, casements with six-light fanlights. All three upper story windows on both flanking sections of the facade have metal awnings which hide the fanlights and the concrete band located along the top of the window arch. Between each window on the upper story are ornamental, concrete, triangular designs. Separating the basement windows from the first floor windows is a concrete beltcourse. The flanking sections are identical except for the cornerstone located on the south corner of the west elevation. The cornerstone, situated immediately above the stringcourse, lists the names of the Board of Directors of the library when it was constructed.

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The central pavillion of the facade, projected away from the flanking sections, is further set off by a brick parapet which projects above the roofline of the building. The parapet has a concrete cap. Centered within the parapet is a molded concrete arch which contains the main entry, now a metal and glass door. The transom space above the door has been filled in with smooth concrete which does not match the color of the historic concrete. The sides of the arch are composed of concrete columns with composite order capitals. Rising above the composite order capitals on each side are two square pilasters with square, Doric order capitals. The Doric order capitals give way to the simple, round arch of the entry. Centered low in the arch is a concrete ornament consisting of an open book with garland and torch relief. Above the arched entry is a simple rectangular, concrete band which reads "19 PUBLIC LIBRARY 29." On either side of the concrete entry, at about the height of the ornament above the door, are triangular shaped shields containing urns. At mid-height of these ornaments are short, concrete decorative bands which wrap around the sides of the projecting center portion to extend along the building at the top of the upper story windows. The above-grade entry is accessed by a low flight of concrete stairs with brick wing walls capped with concrete. A metal railing has been added to the stairs, extending west from the south side of the doorway.

The short sides created by the projecting central portion of the facade contain one window on each floor. The upper story window is arched to match the windows in the flanking sections of the facade. However, this window is narrower, consisting of a six pane window with a two-light fanlight. The basement window is also smaller than the other basement windows on the facade, being only six panes.

The south elevation is the only other elevation which faces onto a street. The symmetrical elevation is similar to the front elevation in that the fenestration pattern is broken into a three-one-three pattern. In the center of the south elevation, at the basement level, is a single, metal slab door. The at-grade door has a concrete walk with narrow, brick wing walls. The wing walls have a concrete cap. On either sides of this central area are three casement windows on the basement floor and three casement windows on the first floor. The south elevation windows match those in the flanking sections of the

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facade. The first floor windows are also covered with metal awnings. Matching the facade, the windows are divided by the concrete stringcourse.

The north elevation differs slightly from the south elevation. The north elevation has no entry and the symmetry is interrupted by a shouldered, brick chimney in place of one the windows. The east side of the north elevation contains three arched windows on the first floor with three flat windows on the basement level. The window type is the same as found on the other elevations for the basement windows and two of the first floor windows. The west half of the inside window partially consists of louvers with the bottom panes of the casement window in place. The three upper story windows on the east side of the north elevation do not have metal awnings. The narrow central portion of the north elevation contains only one casement window at the basement level. This six pane window is half the width of the other basement windows. The west portion of the north elevation contains two windows on both floors. Again, the windows match the other windows on the building. The upper story windows have metal awnings. Located in between the windows on both floors is a brick chimney. The chimney narrows when it reaches the top of the first floor windows and projects above the roof. Situated off the east side of the north elevation are various heating and cooling units.

The rear elevation of the Norman Public Library faces east and has been painted. This elevation has been impacted by the construction of two additions. However, much of the original material and design of the east elevation remains visible. The addition extends from a brick and glass walkway attached on the central portion of the east elevation. Visible on the north side of the east elevation are four first floor windows and one basement window. Three of the four first floor windows are arched windows identical to other first floor windows with two of the windows having metal awnings. The remaining window is a narrow, arched, six light window. The window pattern, from south to north, is standard first floor window, then the narrow window, then two standard first floor windows. The one basement window, located near the walkway, matches the other basement windows. The south side of the east elevation is similar to the north side. The first floor windows are identical to those found on the north side with the exception that all three of the standard first floor windows have metal awnings. The one basement window also

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matches other basement windows; however, the visible basement window on the south side of the east elevation is located near the south wall. Located in line with the innermost first floor window, the remaining portion of the basement level of the east elevation has been obscured with a wood fence.

The brick and glass walkway which connects the original building with the additions is centrally located on the rear elevation. The walkway is solid brick on the north side and glass on the south side. The first addition to the building was constructed in 1977 by The Constructor Incorporated. The addition was designed by W. Haskell Olivo, Jr. In 1980, the second phase of the addition was completed by James Engdahl Builders, Inc. This addition was designed by Craig Sinclair Smith and Associates. Both additions combine to create a relatively large, flat roofed, Modern style addition. The addition also uses blond brick but it has a blond brick band rather than the concrete stringcourse and bands of the original building. Additionally, the windows are narrow, fixed windows. The doors to the addition are double, glazed slab and metal slab. There are glazed slab entries to the addition on the south and east sides. The one entry on the north side is metal slab. There are no entries on the west side.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

Although no longer in use as a library, the Norman Public Library retains much of its original configuration on both floors. The finishes also maintain much of their historic character. Overall, the interior retains a fairly high degree of integrity.

From the vestibule, the first floor opens onto a large, rectangular, open room. Still located in the corners of the room are several bookshelves with books. The ceiling has king post trusses and nonhistoric, florescent lights. On the north side of the room, hidden by a large television, is the original tile fireplace. The fireplace has brown tiles along the edges, capped with buffalo heads on the corners, and yellow/black tiles in the inner portions. Centrally located below the mantel is a Native American design. Both the doorways on the east and west sides of the room have decorative trusses.

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Going through the door on the east side of the main room, one enters another open room. Although not as spacious as the main room, this room has similar finishes. On the south side is the librarian's office. This room maintains much of its historic character.

The basement of the Norman Public Library consists of two classrooms and space for the heating plant. The classroom on the south side of the basement retains much of its historic character. On the south side of the room are stairs with a historic railing to exterior of the building. The classroom on the west side of the basement is currently used for art classes.

The addition to the building, constructed to serve the new use of the building as a senior citizens center, contains a large lunchroom and kitchen on the first floor. Other classroom space is available in the basement.

ALTERATIONS/ADDITIONS

The original Norman Public Library building has been minorly altered by the replacement of the doors, addition of a metal railing on the front stairs, painting of the rear elevation and construction of a wood fence at the back of the building. The dates of these alterations is unknown. However, due to their insignificant nature, these changes do not significantly impact the overall integrity of the building.

Of more import is the construction of two additions on the rear of the building. The first addition was added in 1977 and the second in 1980. The additions are attached to the original building by a brick and glass walkway at the center of the rear elevation. Both additions are minimal in style and combine to create a relatively large addition. Although the size of the addition is distressing, it does not impact the original design of the library. The historic, rectangular design of the building and the fenestration pattern of the rear elevation remains apparent. The additions match the historic building material of blond brick; however, the decorative detail and modern style windows and doors differentiate the contemporary from the historic. With their tenuous connection to the original library, they become almost a separate building.

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The other major change to the historic character of the building are found in the building's setting. When originally constructed, the building was situated in more of a residential setting. This setting has given way to a more commercial setting.

The interior of the building maintains a fairly high degree of integrity. The rooms remain open with minimal furnishings. Since the early 1970s, the building has been used as a senior citizen's center by the Norman Parks and Recreation Department.

Overall, the Norman Public Library retains its integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association sufficiently to meet the eligibility requirements of the National Register of Historic Places.

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SUMMARY

The Norman Public Library is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. Under Criterion A, the building is significant for its association with education in the city from its construction in 1929 to 1950, the National Register fifty year cut off. As the town library, the building provided a critical means of educational opportunity for all Norman residents. Concerning Criterion C, the building is a good example of public library built in the 1920s. Designed by the Oklahoma City architectural firm of Hawk and Parr, the building is also an excellent example of an Italian Renaissance style building in Norman.

BACKGROUND

Similar to many towns in central Oklahoma, Norman's origins date back to 1889 and the first Oklahoma Land Run. However, Norman has a brief pre-1889 history as a stop along the branch line extended through Oklahoma by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway beginning in 1884. The railway station, and subsequently the city, was named for a government engineer who had camped in the vicinity of the present site of the town in 1872.¹ Although there were only a few railroad buildings at Norman Station, one of the lasting impacts of the original railroad occupation of the site was the town's Original Townsite plat. Railroad officials took upon themselves the duty of preparing a townsite plat which reflected their own interests. As such, unlike many Oklahoma towns, Norman's townsite does not follow the traditional grid pattern espoused by the federal government. Instead, Norman's Original Townsite was laid out in relation to the railroad rather than to the points of the compass. Later development of the city followed the more traditional grid pattern, creating a noticeable jog between the original town and subsequent additions.

¹Institute of Community Development, University of Oklahoma, "Norman, the University City: Community Resources," (Norman, Oklahoma: Community Development Committee of the Norman Chamber of Commerce, 1949), 5.

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On April 21, 1889, the site that would become the town of Norman was open prairie, devoid of anything save a railroad track and cluster of railroad buildings. By nightfall, April 22, Norman had mushroomed to a town of five hundred and numerous temporary shelters. The Santa Fe Railway turned over its plat to the first townsite company that arrived. Rather than remarking the lots of the new town, the townsite company embraced the railroad's development plans and construction was quickly underway.

Norman experienced a relatively stable population growth through the first half of the twentieth century. By the time Oklahoma was officially granted statehood in 1907, Norman's population stood at 3,040. Three years later, the population stood at 3,724, a gain of nearly seven hundred residents. In 1920, Norman claimed just over five thousand residents. The 1920s proved be a major decade of growth for Norman. City population nearly doubled from 5,004 in 1920 to 9,603 in 1930. Gaining slightly less than 2000 residents in the ensuing decade, by 1940 Norman's population stood at 11,429. The 1940s also bought an explosion in the number of Norman residents so that by 1949, city population reached 20,180. It must be remembered, however, that these numbers did not accurately reflect the number of people actually living within the city due to the number of college students residing in the town on a temporary basis.²

Two major state institutions greatly influenced the maturation of the city throughout this time period, continuing to the present. The "most important factor in the growth" of the town was the location of the University of Oklahoma in the city. The University opened its doors in September 1892 in a building on Main Street. By 1948, over eleven thousand students attended the school which included nearly one hundred buildings on a main campus of nearly three hundred acres on the southwest side of Norman. The second state institution which affected the development of the town was the Central State Hospital. Opened in 1915 in a previously privately owned mental institution, Central State Hospital became the state's largest mental treatment center by the late 1940s. In addition to operating its own farm and dairy, the hospital

²Institute of Community Development, "Norman, the University City," 8.

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also ran canning plants, a laundry, mattress factory and furniture factory. In all by 1949, the hospital was valued at over four million dollars with 111 buildings spread over an area of 820 acres.³

Like all moderately sized towns, Norman also required a number of public buildings to serve community needs, such as a city hall, county courthouse and federal building. Some needs, however, were met in a variety of temporary quarters until a permanent home could be established. For example, the town's library was located at numerous private and public buildings until a permanent building was built in 1929.

Norman's first public library was established in 1895 when a reading room was opened over a downtown store. Books for the reading room were acquired through subscription and donation. Members of the various women's clubs supervised the reading room. Later, the location changed to a photographic studio and patrons were able to borrow the books. While the library continued to be moved from place to place, one Norman women's club, the "War Mothers," assumed management of the library. Under the direction of the War Mothers, the library moved first to the Episcopal church and, subsequently, to the basement of the Methodist Church. Due to the growing size of the library, the War Mothers eventually turned operation of the library over to the American Legion. In 1921, the American Association of University Women "took up the library problem" and appointed a committee to establish a regular library.⁴

During the 1920s, the Norman Library Association was formed. By the late 1920s, the association had over four hundred members. Each member paid a one dollar membership fee which was used to maintain the library and engage the services of a librarian.⁵

³Ibid., 5.

⁴The Norman (Oklahoma) Transcript, 19 December 1929.

⁵Ibid., 11 January 1929.

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In 1928, the Norman Library Association, under the direction of Mrs. A.J. Williams, opened the Norman Public Library in a building on West Main Street. On 13 May 1929, the library on West Main Street closed for the last time. Although the new building was not ready for use, the old library closed because the rental contract for the West Main Street building had expired and the librarian, Mrs. Emma Engleman, was going to spend the summer studying at the University of Oklahoma in preparation for her new position as librarian at the new municipal library.⁶

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

In November 1928, residents of the city of Norman approved a \$25,000 bond issue to construct a new municipal library in a special election. The bond issue carried with a majority of only eighty-three votes. Total, 1,511 votes were cast in the election with 797 in favor of the new library and 714 against. Wards One and Two came out against the new library, while the remaining wards were in favor of the new construction. The special bond issue election came about after members of the Norman Library Association presented a petition to the city commission asking for the special election.⁷

The bonds for the library were put up for sealed bid on 31 December 1928 with the city purchasing them at three percent interest. In all, fifty bonds were issue in denominations of \$500. All bonds were to be retired within twenty years.⁸

In January 1929, Mayor Guy Spottswood was authorized to appoint a six member library board. As appointed by the mayor and approved by the city commission,

⁶John Womack, "The Annals of Cleveland County, Oklahoma, 1889-1959," excerpts from The Norman Transcript, (n.p., 1981), n.pg. See also The Norman Transcript, 13 May 1929.

⁷The Norman Transcript, 7 November 1928.

⁸Ibid., 18 December 1928 and 2 January 1929.

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the board consisted of Mrs. Boss Lindsey, Mrs. Myrtle Burnett, Mrs. A.J. Williams, Mrs. W.L. Dillard, Mrs. F.A. Balyeat and Mrs. G.M. Clifton. Formerly president of the Norman Library Association, Mrs. A.J. Williams was quickly elected to chair the new library board. Mrs. G.M. Clifton was elected vice chairman and Mrs. Myrtle Burnett was elected secretary. Although the library board was to initially appoint a subcommittee to handle the construction details, the Mayor was subsequently authorized to create the building commission. In addition to the library board chairman and secretary, the building commission included City Manager John T. Hamill, Commissioner Ray F. Fischer and Mayor Guy Spottswood. Following the selection of the site for the new library by the entire library board, the building commission would begin to develop the building plans. All activities were subject to the approval of the city commission.⁹

By late January 1929, the library board was considering seven possible sites for the municipal library. Of the seven, Mrs. Williams indicated to the local newspaper that three sites were "very suitable." Although the board was to have chosen a site by the 22nd of January, the site was not determined until 31 January. Consisting of Lots 29 through 32, Block 11, Original Townsite, the selected site was located at the corner of South Peters Avenue and East Symmes Street. The site, measuring 100 feet wide by 140 feet deep, fronted onto Symmes Street. A five-room house, owned by local attorney John E. Luttrell, was located on the south part of the site. The northern portion of the site was owned by Mrs. Alice Stevens of Tulsa. The site was selected because the board felt it was "less expensive, (was) more centrally located, afford(ed) greater parking space and (was) on a street where traffic (was) light." At a cost of \$4,400, the chosen site was priced \$900 less than the other most desirable site at University Boulevard and Main Street. The Norman city commission unanimously approved the site at a special meeting held on 5 February 1929.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., 2 January 1929, 9 January 1929 and 11 January 1929.

¹⁰Ibid., 1 February 1929 and 6 February 1929.

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With the site selected, the building commission immediately went into action. While able to make general plans, the commission made no definite plans until an architect was selected. Moving quickly, the commission chose the Oklahoma City firm of Hawk and Parr to design the new building by mid-February 1929. In addition to designing numerous commercial buildings in Oklahoma City, including the Biltmore Hotel (destroyed), the Harbour-Longmire Building (NR 1980), the Perrine Building and the Tradesman's National Bank Building (NR 1980), Hawk and Parr also designed the First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa, the Scottish Rite Temple in Guthrie (NR 1987) and the original buildings of the Federal Reformatory near El Reno.¹¹

By the end of February 1929, Hawk and Parr submitted pencil drawings for the library to the building commission. On 9 April 1929, the architectural firm submitted the final plans for the building to the building commission. In less than two weeks, the building commission approved the plans and called for bids for construction of the building. As originally designed, the building was to measure forty-two feet by sixty-two feet. Constructed of brick, the building was to have a tile roof. Although only one story in height, the library was designed with a full basement. The first floor of the building was to contain a large reading room, a library room, a children's room and a study room. A lecture room, kitchenette, book bindery room and boiler room were to be located in the basement. Construction cost was anticipated to be under \$20,000.¹²

Five contracting firms bid on the library project. Two of the firms were from Norman with the remaining three being Oklahoma City firms. At a low bid of \$19,706, the Norman firm of Barbour and Short was selected to construct the library by the building commission. Other bids on the project ranged from \$20,100 to \$22,100. While receiving bids from contractors, the library

¹¹Ibid., 6 February 1929 and 12 February 1929. See also Bob Blackburn et al. The Physical Legacy: Buildings of Oklahoma County, 1889-1931, (Southwestern Heritage Press for the Oklahoma County Historical Society, 1980) 60.

¹²The Norman Transcript, 9 April 1929 and 21 April 1929.

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building commission also received bids for the sale of the existing house on the site. The commission sold the house to George Stinson for \$386, who agreed to move the building immediately.¹³

While settling the final details prior to the start of construction activities, the library board also determined the name of the new library should honor one of the principal movers in the development of the new building, Mayor Guy Spottswood. As such, in early May 1929, the board voted that the name of the building should be the "Guy Spottswood Public Library."¹⁴ Although the board's decision was announced in the local newspaper, the name never apparently caught on. Besides the one newspaper article announcing the board's decision, the newspaper does not refer to the building by that name again. Additionally, the name inscribed on the building itself, above the front door, is simply "Public Library" with the date of construction. Because of a lack of historical evidence indicating that the name "Guy Spottswood Public Library" was ever used in application to the building, it is also not used in this nomination. As best evidence indicates, the building was commonly termed the "Norman Public Library."

Clearing of the library lot began on 23 May 1929 and was expected to take only two to three days. Construction of the building was to begin as soon as the house on the site was gone. The contract with Barbour and Short called for the building to be complete within ninety days of the start of construction.¹⁵

By 23 June 1929, the foundation for the municipal library was complete and the brick work around the foundation had begun. A temporary delay had been experienced due to a wait for a brick shipment but the building was expected to be complete by mid-September. On 26 July 1929, the cornerstone was laid without any public ceremony and within days, the brick work was up to the main

¹³Ibid., 21 April 1929, 24 April 1929 and 5 May 1929.

¹⁴Ibid., 5 May 1929.

¹⁵Ibid., 23 May 1929.

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floor. However, the opening of the library was expected to be delayed until the first of October. By the end of August 1929, the building was "practically complete..., with all the plaster and paint work finished." Workmen remained busy building shelves and cases through November 1929. By early November, the linoleum floor coverings were in place and the fireplace in the reading room was nearing completion. However, movement of books into the library was delayed until the heating plant was in place.¹⁶

Following a dedication on 18 December 1929, the new Norman Public Library officially opened its doors on 19 December 1929. At the dedication, the keys to the building, received from the contractors, were presented to the library board by Mayor T. Jack Foster. Within two days of opening, the library checked out 230 books. Business at the library continued to expand through the following years. By the end of August 1930, the library issued 2,300 borrowers' card and handled 37,320 book requests. During this period, the library recorded an average daily circulation of 180 books.¹⁷ The building remained in use as a library until the early 1970s. At that time, the Norman Parks and Recreation Department turned the building into a Senior Citizens Center.

Public libraries served the community in a variety of ways. The primary benefit of a public library was the enhanced educational opportunities it afforded all residents. A public library, as indicated by its name, was open to the general residents of the city to read a variety of books and magazines they may not have had access to otherwise. Additionally, through the support of local organizations, members of the community were able to expand their knowledge on particular subjects. For example, the Norman Public Library received donations of books from the Norman Business and Professional Women's Club. In addition to general books needed by the library, the Norman Business

¹⁶Ibid., 23 June 1929, 28 July 1929, 26 August 1929 and 7 November 1929.

¹⁷Ibid., 18 December 1929, 19 December 1929, 22 December 1929 and 31 August 1930.

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and Professional Women's Club donation included books that could be "used for vocational study by present club members and those interested in the various vocations for women." Similarly, the Norman Garden Club and associated groups donated a "valuable collection of books on gardening and landscaping" for use by club members and the general public to expand their gardening skills.¹⁸

In addition to enhancing the available educational opportunities, public libraries also served as important community centers. From the opening of the building, the auditorium located in the basement of the building was a gathering spot for local club meetings. Other community events were also held in the building throughout its use as a public building. For example, the Norman Council of Garden Clubs held their flower show there in 1930. Additionally, the cooking school sponsored by The Norman Transcript was held in the basement.¹⁹

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Norman Public Library is a good example of a municipal library built in the 1920s. Typical of early twentieth century library buildings, the Norman library was a relatively simple building that exuded a classical style and fine interior finishes. The Norman Public Library was designed in the Italian Renaissance style. This style, along with other classical inspired styles such as Classical Revival and Colonial Revival, was particularly popular for libraries at the time. As evident by its frequent use in libraries built with funds given by the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, the classical inspired styles fashionable during the early twentieth century were believed to equate "the era's faith in education with its ideals of good citizenship."²⁰ The

¹⁸Ibid., 13 May 1929 and 26 August 1929.

¹⁹Ibid., 31 August 1930.

²⁰Alan Gowans, Styles and Types of North American Architecture: Social Function and Cultural Expression (New York, New York: IconEdition, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993) 246.

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interior finishes of the library, while not ostentatious, were in keeping with the dignity of the community. The trussed ceiling and tile fireplace added to the cottage-like atmosphere of the library meant to encourage citizens to peruse the available books and periodicals and, thereby, expand their knowledge.

As previously mentioned, the Norman Public Library was designed by the Oklahoma City architectural firm of Hawk and Parr. J.W. Hawk and J.O. Parr entered into partnership in 1914. The partnership endured until 1932, when Hawk retired from the architectural profession. Parr continued to design until his death in 1940. Hawk and Parr designed "Many of the most noted buildings in Oklahoma City's downtown commercial district..." The firm has been characterized as "One of the most outstanding architectural firms to practice in Oklahoma County..."²¹

Because a complete listing of their works has never been compiled, it is unknown if they designed any other buildings in Norman. The newspaper article in The Norman Transcript that announced the selection of Hawk and Parr as the library architects mentions specific works in Oklahoma City and Guthrie currently under construction; however, the article does not indicate the firm had done any previous work in Norman.²² Additionally, it is unknown if the firm designed any other libraries. Nonetheless, the firm executed a design that well suited its purpose and is representative of early twentieth century library design.

Hawk and Parr also designed a building that serves as an excellent representation of the Italian Renaissance style in Norman. The library is currently located on the south fringes of downtown Norman. Although close to the central business district today, when originally constructed, the building was in more of a residential setting. As such, the Italian Renaissance style of the library complimented the Prairie School, Craftsman and late nineteenth

²¹Blackburn, Physical Legacy, 60.

²²The Norman Transcript, 12 February 1929.

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and twentieth century revival style buildings in the surrounding neighborhood. In the immediate area to the north, east and west of the building, the historic dwellings have given way to modern styled, commercial buildings. In the block south of the building, the homes have been demolished to create a small, one block park.

Although the setting of the building has been altered, the Norman Public Library remains an excellent representation of an Italian Renaissance style building in Norman. It is also a good example of a public library built in the 1920s. Further, as the public library, the building served as an important tool in the educational means of the community.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 29 through 32, Block 11, Original Town of Norman, Section 29, Township 9 North, Range 2 West.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the Norman Public Library.



Norman Public Library





Norman Public Library

