

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Carnegie Free Library, Beaver Falls

and or common Carnegie Library of Beaver Falls

2. Location

street & number 1301 - 7th Avenue not for publication

city, town Beaver Falls vicinity of Fronting on Main St. of 7th Ave. at 13th St.

state Pennsylvania code 042 county Beaver 007 code

3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Library

4. Owner of Property

name Big Beaver Falls Area School District

street & number 16th Street & 8th Avenue

city, town Beaver Falls vicinity of state Pennsylvania

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Beaver County Courthouse, Registry of Deeds

street & number P.O. Box 537 - 3rd Street

city, town Beaver state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Economy Plan of Lots-Lot # 36 has this property been determined eligible? yes  no

date April/1885-April/1898, August 31, 1896 federal state  county local

depository for survey records Beaver County Registry of Deeds

city, town Beaver state Pennsylvania

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

N/A

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Carnegie Free Library is an impressive two story structure centrally located at 1301-7th avenue in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. The building, garnering the strategic setting of a corner lot, was designed in the neo-classical or Palladian tradition. The exterior of the building rests on a stone foundation finished in granite approximately 4-5 feet from ground level. From thereon, the building is finished in yellow brick with the sills and window ledges of the upper windows pre-cast in terra cotta. The trim surrounding the first floor windows are also lined with terra cotta moldings. The eastern facade of the Building, fronting the main street of Beaver Falls, boasts of a large Grecian Portico supported by four columns. The window over the front and main entrance is of fan light design and hand crafted of wood and stained glass. A curtain of grass and shrubbery accents the South and East sides of the building.

The roof of the library is reinforced with buttresses evenly distributed on its North, East, and South sides. Although it was replaced with asphalt shingle several years ago, the roof's contour and color were kept in tact. An original skylight, numerous chimneys, and several dormers adorning the main trusses of the building remain in place and unchanged. Framed in between the buttresses are a series of windows, two with four panels in the foundation, an arched six footer on the first floor with the top frame being fixed, and two-double hung on the third floor. The fact that they are original and single paned results in the library experiencing considerable loss of energy. The only other minor changes on the exterior was the replacement of a front door with one that met the building code and the enclosure of one or two windows and doors with matching brick. Another reason for these changes was to avoid heat loss and minimize the possibility of vandalism. There are two main entrances to the structure, each being accessed by stone risers that span well beyond the openings.

The rear of the building faces west, adjoining a common alley way. To reduce the possibility of vandalism and theft, the library opted to eliminate a few of its windows. The west wall also makes up the largest of the two outside walls to what was once an auditorium. The fire escape that led from its balcony clings to the top center

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area of the wall. Unlike the borders of the South and East, The western side of the library has no grass nor shrub areas. The building is relatively land locked with only minimal allocation for off-street parking found on the north side of the facility.

Similar to many Carnegie Libraries of the period, the Beaver Falls library is constructed rectangular in shape with a basement, first, and second floors. The design of the basement conforms to what Carnegie envisioned as the ideal utilization of space for his libraries; eventhough in those days no architects were to be found that specialized in library design. It houses the heating plant, restrooms, storage, work, and lecture rooms. In regard to the first floor; there was also very little, if any, deviation from his standard model. High ceilings can be found throughout the main floor. The entrance way typifies those to be found in the earlier Carnegie libraries of the day. Its' corridor is 18-20' wide and envelops a circulation desk, with circular wood columns and beams accenting the ceiling and surrounding areas.

Referring to the floor plans of the first and second floors, we find that there have been few alterations to the design layout as conceived by the architect. The adult reading room, children's room, reference and book stacks have remained on the first floor. Due to expansion needs, however, the auditorium had to be converted in 1961 to accommodate future use as a reading and stack room. This involved removing the seats from the auditorium's main floor and leveling the sloping floor to an elevation equal to the lobby. The stage area was transformed into a work area. To date, the balcony and its seats have remained untouched. A small reference area immediately to the rear of the main checkout counter was made into a records room and an office for the library's Director. In an effort to improve lighting and minimize heat loss, many of the ceilings on the second floor were lowered. Even though the one meeting room as depicted on the basement floor plan has been used to house a local museum for Beaver County, there has not been any dramatic changes in its layout or decor. Other than the lowering of ceilings on the second floor; there has been only one other minor change, the addition of a wall at the top of the main stairwell to meet local occupancy codes.

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The entire interior of the building is trimmed out in exquisite wood detail as it was originally hand chiseled by skilled carpenters in the early 1900's. The wood grain is of a walnut or light oak texture and very little, if any, has been painted. The majority of the doors were fabricated in a three panel design and trimmed out in better than 6" casing. The entrance has remained untouched, adhering to the objective of dedication to detail that can be found throughout the interior. The arched fan light over the front entrance door; draws visitors, greets them as they enter, and beckons them to soon return as they leave. The inside wood columns have been carved in the Roman Ionic tradition. Also adorning the walls in various rooms are several hand carved wood mantels with the tops displaying a Roman pulvinated style, supported by Ionic columns also made out of wood. Many of the ceilings are supported by matching wood beams and highlighted by crown molding made out of plaster.

Overall, the few changes that have been made to the building did nothing to affect its' historic value. The Board of Directors of the Library have taken the position that any work on the building will be in keeping with the ultimate objective of preserving its' historical integrity.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1899

Builder/Architect F.J. Osterling

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The product of a fifteen year campaign by local residents, the Carnegie Free Library in Beaver Falls has been a landmark within the community since its construction in 1899. A good example of Neo-Classical style architecture, the building is one of the larger Carnegie libraries. The twelfth of two dozen such facilities in Pennsylvania, the Beaver Falls branch was one of the last monumental Carnegie Library buildings. Subsequent buildings featured more austere design qualities and smaller proportions with an emphasis on utility and economy of space.

The effort to institute a library in Beaver Falls began during the fall of 1883 when a group of community leaders formed a library association. Raising money through a series of lectures, the association was able to establish the town's first library in a local grocery. For the next few years the facility grew slowly, but proved inadequate to serve the community's needs. Deciding to erect their own building, the association sought the aid of Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie was asked to be the keynote speaker at an industrial exposition organized by the library association. Though he was unable to attend, Carnegie sent a small contribution. The gift initiated a series of events over the next few years that culminated in an offer of \$50,000 from Carnegie for the purpose of erecting a new library building in Beaver Falls.

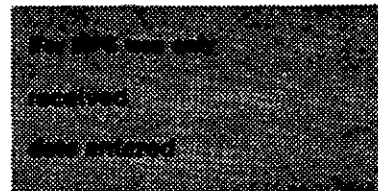
Securing a building site in the commercial section of the town, the association commissioned the architectural firm of Frederick J. Osterling to design their building. An architect with a promising future, Osterling's works at the time already included the Magee Building (1892) in Pittsburgh. He was also involved in numerous projects throughout western Pennsylvania that would make him one of the more prominent turn-of-the-century architects in the Pittsburgh area.

The building that Osterling designed in Beaver Falls further enhanced the architects growing reputation. A fine example of the Neo-Classical style, the library is larger and more substantial than most Carnegie libraries. Resting on a stone foundation the two story structure features numerous classical elements. Perhaps the most outstanding feature is the full-height pedimented portico that dominates the front facade. Two colossal columns stand on either side of the entrance and with corresponding two-story pilasters appearing on all facades lend the building an air of monumentality. Fenestration throughout adds to the symmetrical proportions of the building. Architecturally one of the more outstanding Carnegie libraries, the Beaver Falls Carnegie Library became a local landmark immediately after its completion in 1899.

The Beaver Falls Carnegie Library was one of the last elaborate libraries built with Carnegie funds. In the early part of the twentieth century Carnegie became disturbed that "architectural monstrosities" were being built with his money. To curtail the extravagant pursuits of grantees he hired James Bertram to oversee the construction of future libraries. Bertram's primary goals were to see that an economy of space and functional utility were incorporated into future library buildings. Likewise, standardize floor plans were devised to use interior space in the most efficient ways. Instead of large, elaborate "Greek temples" like the library in Beaver Falls, Carnegie libraries built after about 1905 in communities the size of Beaver Falls were noticeably smaller and cottage-like.

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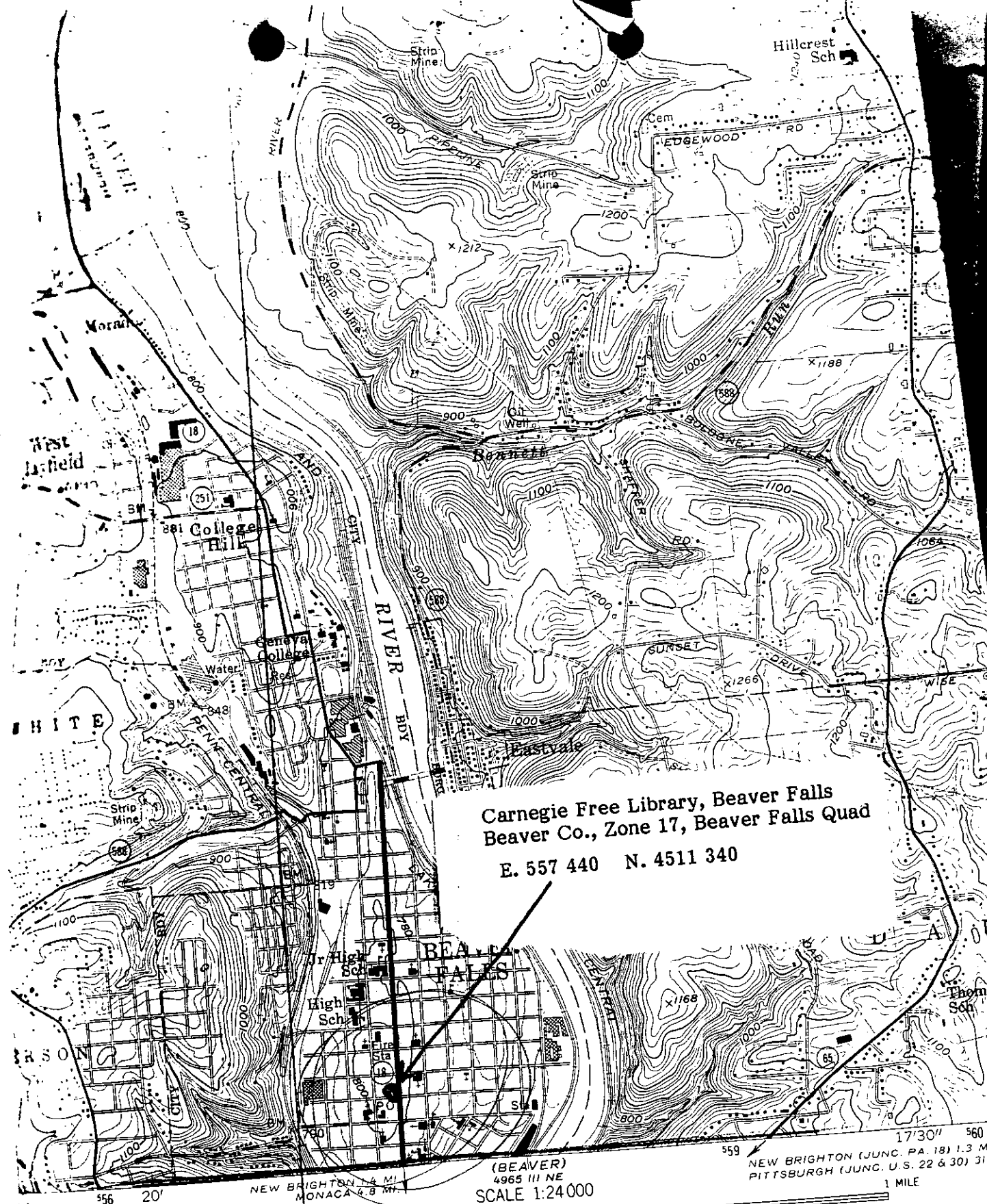


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From the time the Carnegie Library in Beaver Falls first opened its doors, the facility has been important to the educational and cultural life of Beaver County. Maintained by the local school board, the library became a focal point in the county's educational system. For a time the library was also the only facility in the county equipped to handle stage performances. Throughout the early twentieth century lectures, high school commencements, musicals, talent shows and religious crusades were held on the library's stage. While the building is no longer used to the extent it was fifty years ago, it is still recognized as a culturally important and an architecturally distinguished building in Beaver Falls.



**Carnegie Free Library, Beaver Falls**  
**Beaver Co., Zone 17, Beaver Falls Quad**  
**E. 557 440 N. 4511 340**

