

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name United States Post Office, Charleroi, Pa.  
other names/site number John K. Tener Library

2. Location

street & number 638 Fallowfield Avenue  
city, town Charleroi, N/A not for publication  
state Pennsylvania code PA county Washington code 125 zip code 15022  
N/A vicinity

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.  See continuation sheet.

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

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

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

5. National Park Service Certification

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 the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Government--Post Office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Education--Library

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival

foundation Stone--Granite

walls Stone--Granite

roof Slate

other

**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Charleroi Post Office Building (now J.K.Tener Library) is a two story structure, rectangular in plan, which was built during the period 1909-1912. The primary construction material is granite, and the building's foundation and walls are composed of this material. The building is in the Classical Revival style. It is constructed in ten foot structural bays, seven bays wide across the facade, by four bays deep. The building is situated on sloping ground near the heart of Charleroi's central business district, and is set back fifteen feet from Fallowfield Avenue, which it faces. The ground slopes down along the side of the building exposing the basement in the rear elevation. The Charleroi Post Office is located in a dense section of Charleroi, five blocks by eight blocks, containing approximately four hundred structures (mostly commercial buildings and small residences) built between the years 1890 and 1915. The building was acquired by the Metropolitan Area Public Library Association, Inc. in 1972, and during the years 1978 and 1979, a restoration of the building was carried out. Since the objective of the restoration program was to return the building to its original and historic condition, within the bounds of its new function as a library, its historic integrity remains largely intact. Changes made to the building will be outlined below.

The front of the building (west elevation) is divided into seven bays, the middle five of which enclose an entrance portico. The bays are separated by pilasters of the Tuscan order except across the front of the portico where Tuscan columns are used. The walls and columns rest on a simple granite foundation. All first story windows, except those in the portico, are framed by stone moldings. The sill of each window rests on a pair of granite brackets. Each window is topped by a granite classical architrave and has eight-pane casements, the bottom six of which are operable. The windows in the portico are similar, having the same configuration of panes, but lacking the architrave and frame and set into shallow recesses in the wall. Second story windows are much simpler, having only six panes and no frame. Second story windows in the portico are not divided into panes, but have metalwork grilles in a classical pattern of superimposed squares and diagonal crosses.

The main entrance door is surrounded by an elaborate architrave with a granite molding. On the top of the architrave is a stone relief panel carved in a symmetrical floral motif. The doors are in pairs, clad in copper with a large single light per door. Above the doors is a single-light transom. Covering the transom above the doors is a metal grillwork in the same cross and square pattern as is over the second story windows, except at a smaller scale. The portico itself is raised two feet above grade and is approached by a set of granite steps which have metal railings to each side. The entrance from the street is flanked by two lamps which rest on two foot high granite blocks. Each lamp has three elaborately styled legs a simple straight shaft which flares out at the top, and a round light globe.

A classical entablature rests on the pilasters and columns of the facade. It has a simple architrave, and its frieze contains the words "United States Post Office." The cornice is also quite simple, having only a line of dentils below the molding. A parapet wall, rising in a gradual ziggurated fashion toward its center, tops off the building. This parapet partial conceals the building's hipped roof.

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The north elevation is similar to the south elevation. It is four bays wide and has similar foundation details, pilasters, first story windows (with architrave and surround) and second story windows (six panes each), and entablatures. However, the north elevation's parapet is continuous at one level, unlike the south elevation, which steps up in a ziggurat. More of the foundation is exposed at the north elevation, so that three windows and a door provide openings for light and access into the basement level. The windows are covered with metal security grates. A low wall runs parallel to the building at the edge of the sidewalk. This wall has a gateway aligning with the central bay of the elevation. The gate, constructed of elaborate wrought iron, leads to steps which connect the sidewalk to the basement door, in the center bay at a slightly lower elevation.

The south elevation is identical with the north, except that the ground is level with Fallowfield Avenue on this side, thus leaving none of the basement exposed. The level area to the south provides space for a small paved parking court which is surrounded by a pipe railing fitted with iron rings formerly used to tie-up horses. There is an entrance into the first floor through the rear bay of this elevation. It is accessed by a small stone porch, about two feet higher than the pavement. The porch has been converted to a handicapped entrance by the addition of a ramp. Sheltering the porch is a suspended wooden canopy.

The rear (east) elevation of the building is seven bays wide, the middle five of which contain large, full width, one-and-a-half story windows with six panes each. The windows adjoin the bottom of the entablature at their tops. Below these are smaller windows in the middle five bays. The bays are separated by engaged Tuscan columns. The pilasters at the end bays of this elevation are also of the Tuscan order. The portion of the parapet over these five bays is stepped up a short distance from the parapet level over the end bay area at each end of the building. The foundation on this side of the building is less finished. The granite facing extends downward to a point about five feet above grade, below which point is an unfinished foundation wall. Window openings to the basement level, each covered with a metal grate, pierce the foundation wall at the center of each bay. At the north end of this elevation is a loading dock at the basement level, which consists of a raised concrete platform, with doors accessing the basement level, and a large wooden canopy suspended above to provide shelter. A handicap ramp has been added to the dock platform.

Inside, the building has two large, two-story spaces: the lobby and the former workroom. These two spaces are separated by a wall of stamp sales windows and post office boxes. Some of the stamp windows and boxes which formerly separated the two rooms have been removed to provide easy access between the lobby area and the workroom (both of which are now occupied by reading areas, tables and chairs, and book cases). Some of the windows and boxes (about half of them), though, were retained. Flanking the workroom are small, one story office spaces, with similar offices occupying the same area in the second story.

In the second story, there is a walkway connecting the offices at the north end of the building to those on the south end. This walkway is a corridor, forming a second story wall between the lobby and the former workroom (above the stamp windows and post office boxes). At the west side of this corridor are windows overlooking the lobby below. At the north end of this corridor is a staircase which connects the second and first floors, and which continues down into the basement. The staircase is open from the second floor down to a landing that is midway between the basement floor level and the first floor level, where an oak door provides access to the last few steps into the basement. The staircase has a metal railing with the same classical motif of superimposed squares and diagonal crosses in the balustrade as is found in the exterior grillwork of the facade.

The office spaces of the first and second stories are simple plastered rooms with natural

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finished woodwork. In two of the offices (one at the north end upstairs and one at the south end downstairs) are built-in safes with original government seal emblems decaled on the doors.

There is a hidden network of observation spaces running throughout the building, with tunnels and ladders connecting many of the rooms, originally built for periodic inspections by the postal inspector. This network of observation spaces was typical of post offices built in the first half of the twentieth century. Over the main workroom is an attic walkway with peepholes focused on the former locations of the individual workstations. All of the peepholes and most of the tunnels and ladders have been retained.

The workroom is a very plain room. Its walls and ceilings are plastered and painted white, and what little trim exists in the room is oak millwork. The floor originally had a plain stone finish, but when the building was converted to a library, this area was carpeted over. The room has tall, wooden casement windows with a crank mechanism that opens and closes them (the story-and-a-half windows in the description of the east elevation). The windows are inset in the plastered walls with plastered returns instead of wood surrounds. There is a band of oak trim running horizontally around the room seven feet above floor level. The only major changes made to this room was the carpeting of the floor and the replacement of the original furnishings with tables, chairs, fixed bookcases, and a wooden main desk area adjacent to the remaining sets of post office boxes and stamp windows.

The stamp and service windows that connect the lobby and workroom are trimmed in oak and have translucent glass panes. The teller windows have a lower operable section which opens high enough to let objects be passed through, and an upper operable section which allows the tellers face to be seen. The teller windows are arranged in banks and are alternated with inoperable windows which resemble the teller windows. Above each of the window spaces is a clerestory window which allows light to pass between the workroom and the lobby.

The lobby is a somewhat more elaborate room, with oak millwork trim in the window and door surrounds, and very little plain surface area between the various windows, doors, and stamp windows. The lower three feet of the lobby walls are faced with granite, with plaster walls above. The floor was previously finished in stone, as in the workroom, but is now carpeted. The teller windows facing into this space are trimmed with stained oak millwork, making up large wall areas of oak and translucent glass. The windows, on the Fallowfield Avenue side of the lobby, have decorative metal grilles in the same pattern of superimposed squares and diagonal crosses as found in various other parts of the building. There are lockable oak display cases formerly used for "wanted posters". These are located at the north end of the room, one on the north wall, and another nearby. The display cases are made of oak millwork with carved oak brackets below. The original brass gaslight fixtures are still in use in the lobby, but have been converted to electric. The present globes are replacements. There are also several chain-hung electric fixtures suspended from the lobby ceiling. These have white glass globes in a pattern made at Macbeth Evans Glassworks in Charleroi in the 1910s. The entrance to the lobby from Fallowfield Avenue is enclosed in a small wooden vestibule jutting out into the lobby, which has beveled glass on all sides. Attached to the sides of the vestibule are writing desks with sloped glass-covered tops.

The offices adjacent to the workroom are trimmed in oak millwork. All the office floors have been carpeted. Doors and windows are trimmed in oak, and an oak band runs around the room horizontally at a height of seven feet. Cast iron radiators from the original heating system are still in place in the offices.

The basement contains a plastered "swing room" (lunch room) and several unplastered spaces with brick walls, brick piers, and brick niches in the room below the lobby area. The surveillance tunnel system also extends into the basement.

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The Charleroi Post Office remains largely unchanged in appearance since it was built. The following minor changes have been made to the exterior of the building: the windows on the ends of the entrance portico have had their top two panes replaced with ventilation grilles. The side entrance and loading entrance have been converted to handicap entrances. Some of the first floor windows have been modified to accept air conditioning units. Finally, a sign saying "John K. Tener Library" has been added over the entrance door. Interior changes include: addition of carpeting, conversion of gaslights to electric service, addition of new library furnishings, and removal of some of the post office boxes and stamp windows. The removal of these windows and boxes (about half of the original wall of windows and boxes was dismantled) is the most drastic alteration to the building's original form. All other walls have remained intact, and the library functions have been fit into the existing rooms. The building has survived with its integrity intact--it is a primary example of a historic structure, unchanged in siting, landscaping, finishes, and overall design since its original period of significance.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
Politics/Government

Period of Significance

1909-1939

Significant Dates

1909-1912

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Taylor, James Knox, Sup. Arch. --Treas Dept.

Stiles, George, Construction Company

Heald, E.C., Structural Engineer

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Charleroi Post Office Building is significant as a locally outstanding example of early twentieth century public building architecture, particularly in the Classical Revival style. It is an unusually monumental structure in its context in a small town in the middle portion of Western Pennsylvania's Monongahela Valley. The building also represents the role of Federal government administration and influence in small communities.

Previous to the construction of the Charleroi Post Office Building, the post office was housed in a portion of the Bank of Charleroi Building (this building was torn down and rebuilt in 1925, and has subsequently become a Mellon Bank office) near the corner of Fifth Street and Fallowfield Avenue. Previous to the creation of Charleroi in 1890, the postal area had been served by a post office about a mile to the north at Lock Four for about half a century. The Charleroi Post Office was housed in the building being nominated until a new post office was built about a block away in 1972. The building was acquired by the Metropolitan Public Library Association in 1972, and was renovated for its new function as a library in 1978-79.

Charleroi is a town of small buildings, densely packed on the level portions of an otherwise steep hill overlooking the Monongahela River. Most of the town was built to house workers at three large glass factories, a steam shovel factory, and a coal mine that were started here in the 1890s. The town was the result of an enormously successful land sale on March 4, 1890, which in turn had been one result of the natural gas boom of the 1880's that made it profitable for glass factories to move out of the city of Pittsburgh into small towns at the city's periphery. Most of the town's buildings are very small, built on lots which are typically twenty feet by one hundred feet (sometimes two houses per lot). As a result, the Charleroi Post Office is an imposing element in a dense business district where there are very few buildings larger than twenty feet by one hundred feet.

At the turn of the century, Charleroi was one of about thirty industrial towns along the Monongahela River between West Virginia and Pittsburgh, each of which had roughly the same population (10,000 inhabitants). In this context, it was a highly unusual move for the postal service to build a stone building, especially one of such architectural grandeur. The building is roughly contemporary with brick Colonial Revival structures in Monongahela, Donora, and other valley towns. Other public buildings (banks, borough buildings, and schools built five to ten years earlier) in eastern Washington County and the Mid-Mon Valley are almost always Colonial Revival style, in brick, and are ornamented with a profusion of surface details such as quoins, rusticated voussoirs, and medallions, all in keeping with the Colonial Revival style as it was executed in the area. However, there are only a few examples of Classical Revival buildings in the area, including two banks in Charleroi (First National Bank and the Bank of Charleroi) and one in Monongahela (Monongahela City Trust Company). First National Bank of Charleroi (of which J.K.Tener was president before he ran for congress) was originally a hotel with a brick facade, which was

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refaced with granite in Classical Revival style, very similar in detail to the Charleroi Post Office building, about 1920. Charleroi Bank and Trust Company, originally a brick Colonial revival style bank at the center of Charleroi, was torn down and rebuilt in 1925 with a facade of fluted granite pilasters. All of these Classical Revival structures have full-height stone exteriors, but in comparison with the Charleroi Post Office building, are less monumental because they are row buildings and because of the lack some of the subtle features (such as the use of boldly detailed end bays flanking a recessed portico) that distinguish the post office building as an example of the public building typology. Furthermore, the integrity of the various Classical Revival bank buildings has been compromised over the years, even though they are significantly younger than the post office building (the banks are all from the 1920s, more or less, while the post office is a monumental government building from before World War I). By comparison, the Charleroi Post Office building stands out as an imposing and particularly high style example of Classical Revival architecture, with its round stone columns, its carved architraves, and other Classical Revival details. In this context, this building is a very significant representative of the architectural history of the Monongahela Valley, and particularly of the image presented by the postal service and federal government in the riverside towns of the valley.

The effort and money spent to produce such a monumental structure in a context where such a post office structure is an anomaly may be explained by the building's tangential connection to John K. Tener. Tener was an Irish-born businessman who came to Charleroi as a banker after a short career as a professional baseball player with the Chicago Cubs. He served as U.S. Congressman from 1908 to 1911, and then as Governor of Pennsylvania from 1911 to 1915. The numerous small towns that surround Charleroi in the Monongahela Valley have always had to compete fiercely because they are small and there is very little hierarchy between them. This area has generally been within the bounds of a single congressional district throughout most of its history. When one congressional office serves so many small towns of the same size, it is difficult for all to be treated equitably. It is likely that the reason such a grand post office was built in Charleroi, within a few years of much less pretentious brick structures in nearby towns, was because a Charleroi businessman was in Congress, and during the construction of this building, was popular and successful enough to win the seat of Governor of Pennsylvania.

The Charleroi Post Office building achieves its primary significance from its qualities as a fine example of Classical Revival architecture, as well as from its excellent integrity. It also was an important local center of governmental services and represents Federal government influence in the community.

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

"A Brief History of the Charleroi Library" (brochure at Library)

Blueprints, J.K. Tener Library, at library.

George P. Donehoo, Pennsylvania: A History (1926).

Interview with John C. Smith, 1989, grandson of first postmaster of the nominated building.

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Original blueprints at J.K. Tener Libr

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 0.3

UTM References

A 17 593670 4443660  
 Zone Easting Northing

C \_\_\_\_\_

B \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zone Easting Northing

D \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property corresponds to Tax Parcel number 23-742-0563 in Charleroi.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the tax parcel of the nominated property contain the nominated building and all historically associated land.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Mrs. William Darby

organization Metropolitan Area Public Library

street & number 601 Seventh Street

city or town Charleroi

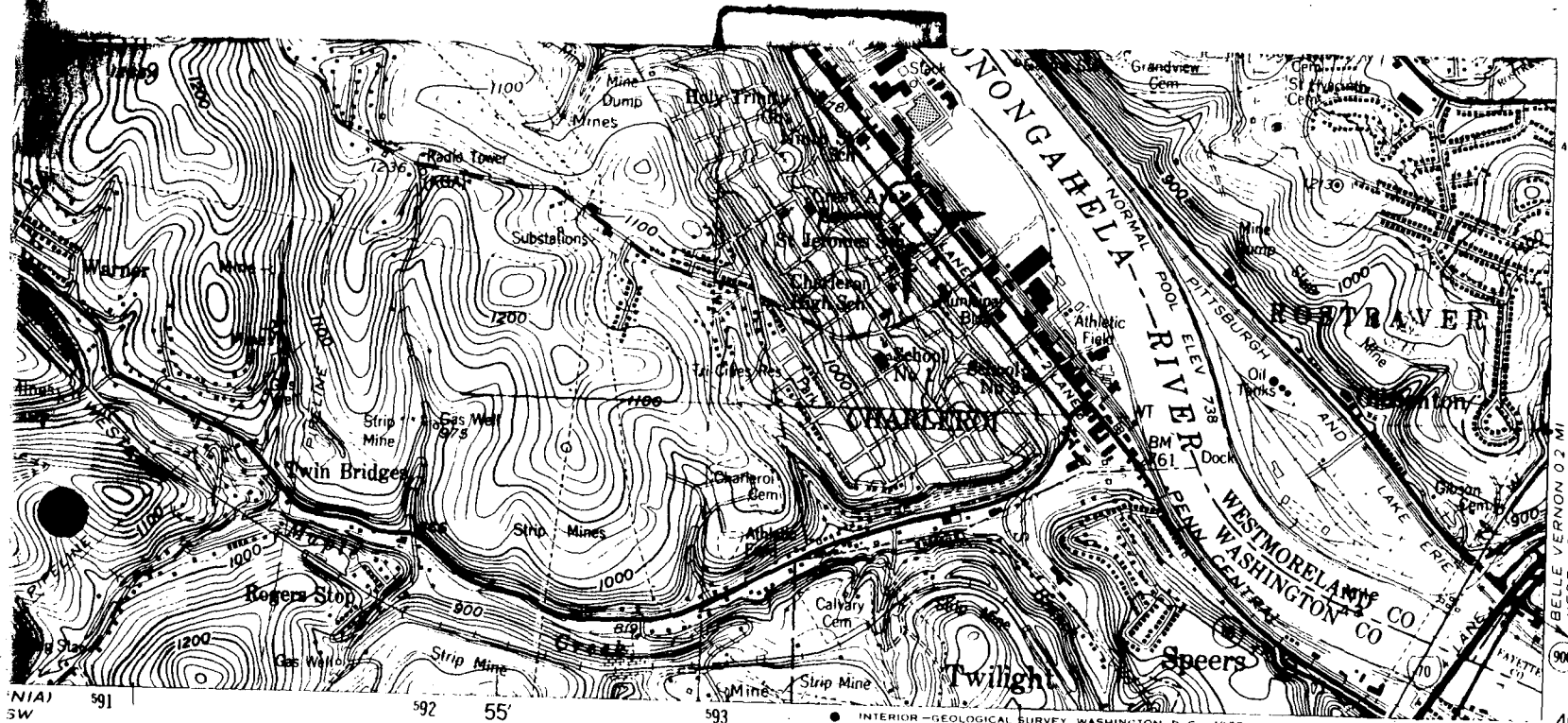
date September 11, 1989

telephone 412-483-8624

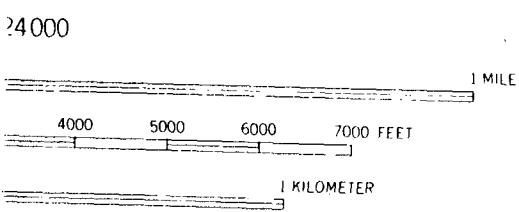
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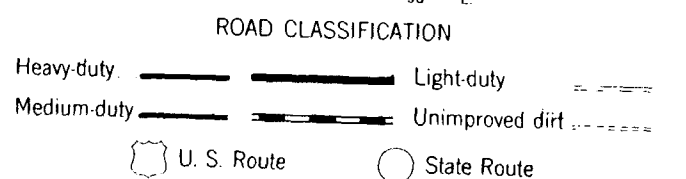
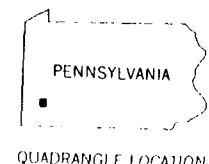




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