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 National Register Bulletin, How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Dryades Branch Library
Other Names/Site Number: YMCA Singleton Charter School
Name of related multiple property listing: n/a

2. Location

Street & Number: 1924 Philip Street
City or town: New Orleans
State: LA
County: Orleans
Not for Publication: 
Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

☐ national ☐ state ☑ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☑ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

Signature of certifying official/Title: Kristin Sanders, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date

Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official:
Date

Title: State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government
4. National Park Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other, explain: ___________________________

Signature of the Keeper ___________________________ Date of Action ____________

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply.)

| X | Private          |
|   | Public – Local  |
|   | Public – State  |
|   | Public – Federal|

Category of Property (Check only one box.)

| X | Building(s)     |
|   | District        |
|   | Site            |
|   | Structure       |
|   | Object          |

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributing</th>
<th>Non-contributing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Buildings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions.): EDUCATION/library

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions.): EDUCATION/school

7. Description
Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions.): Beaux-Arts

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
- foundation: Cement
- walls: Brick
- roof: Tile
- other: Cast Stone ornamentation

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a summary paragraph that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Sitting at the southwestern end of Orthea Castle Haley Boulevard (formerly Dryades Street) in the Central City neighborhood of New Orleans, the freestanding Dryades Branch Library has an air of monumentality in a neighborhood of mostly shotgun homes and scattered with commercial buildings. The two-story institutional building is designed in the Beaux-Arts style, with the majority of construction consisting of brick. While the building’s function has changed over the years and the interior has undergone renovation, there has been no major alteration to the front save for the addition of a fence.

Narrative Description

Setting:
The building is located within the Central City Historic District. Central City is listed for its significance as an exceptionally well-preserved working class neighborhood, composed mostly of shotgun homes. The Beaux-Arts style is not one of those listed as being heavily represented, and the Dryades Street Library is one of the only examples of it in the District. The District’s 1982 nomination from notes that few of its buildings have front yards, with most directly abutting the sidewalk. The Dryades Library’s multi stepped approach causes it to stand out in this context.

Exterior- Front (Northeast facing) Elevation:
On each side of the building’s façade four shallow stone stairs lead up to the first-floor entrances. In front of each door is a small landing with a tile pattern which matches the original plans. Doors are topped with decorative stonework and flanked by corbels. Stairs from both sides lead inward to a second level entrance, in front of which is a small porch area with the same tile pattern as the lower level. The façade is laid out in tripartite form, divided with four ionic engaged columns which frame the inset outer two sections and are complimented by edges lined with decorative quoins. The quoins and columns are composed of stone, which is used in the Beaux-Arts features that decorate the building’s entrances. The second-floor doors feature a similar pattern to the lower level doors, and are topped with a transom window in the same style. On top of the transom is a broken pediment, which opens to make way for a carving of a book. The carving is surrounded by a fanlight, featuring vertical muntins, which sits under a roman arch. Nestled on each side of the arch are bas-relief panels carved in floral patterns, which square out its corners. On either side of the door are torch styles light fixtures, featuring large white bulbs. These are similar to those specified in the building’s original plans.

On each side of the second-floor entrance is a Venetian door leading out to a balcony. The sides of each balcony are decorated with Greek keys. The arch that tops them is identical to the center door, giving the building a sense of symmetry. These doors are set back slightly from the central door, putting the emphasis on...
the main entrance. This central focus is extended to the decorative brick work on the front to of the lower porch, which mirrors the arch above the entrance.

A stepped pediment sits at the top center of the building. Beneath it is a deep stone cornice lined with dentils. The front façade of the building extends up, making the building’s hipped roof invisible from street level. The low pitched, tiled roof hangs over the other the other three sides of the building with deep eaves.

*Exterior-Side Elevations:*
The north and south facing elevations are nearly identical, differing only in the layout of the lower level windows, and meet the front at right angles. The sides have little ornamentation. They are constructed entirely of brick and have a cemented string course wrapping around to delineate the building’s levels. An additional string course runs through the approximate middle of the lower level.

The side fenestrations differ from the original plans. The building’s upper level originally featured pivoted sash windows with metal muntins. The layout, a cluster of three narrow panes in the middle with single panes on either side, remains the same, but the windows themselves have been replaced with single-pane windows.

*Exterior- Rear (Southwest facing) Elevation:*
A square protrusion at the back of the building, included on the original plans, continues the simple style of the side elevations. This part of the structure has a flat, parapet roof. Original plans feature a sashed casement window at the center, but this has since been renovated into a single narrow single pane window and an exit door. This door is accessed by a metal staircase that wraps around the right side of the protrusion.

The left side of the rear elevation matches the original plans, with a double door ground level entrance. The right side features an additional brick section occupying the space between the main building and the protrusion.

*Interior:*
The first floor is entered through a vestibule on an intermediate level between the two floors, which contains steps leading up to the main room and an additional set of stairs leading down to the ground floor. The first floor was originally a single open space called the “Reading Room.” The majority of the open space remains with a partial-height, modular wall panel system creating two side rooms with a narrow hallway through the middle. Original plans call for rails along similar lines, dividing the space into adult and children’s wings. A large decorative arch approximately ¾ of the way back in the reading room has been enclosed and replaced with a small door-sized opening. The outline of the arch is still prominent. Immediately beyond the new smaller opening is a restroom, relocated from its original location at the rear of the room, and an additional storage space. Plaster inlay work around the interior of the front entry door matches original plans, as does the transom window that sits above it.

The basement floor is also a single open space, originally used as a “Lecture Room.” The walls and ceilings are painted with a wood chair rail and base, and the room contains overhead lighting added outside of the period of significance. A prominent feature of this room is a wooden stage at its rear. Original plans also note six eight inch by eight inch square columns in two lines in front of the stage, attached to parallel girders. Four of these columns are still present. Original plans note a “sanitary floor,” and this element remains, maintaining the feeling of the space. This floor can be accessed from the street level.

*Integrity:*
The Library sustained serious damage from Hurricane Betsey in 1965, and a fire shortly afterwards. The earliest photograph of the library was found in a yearly report from 1930. The library’s current façade very closely matches this photo, which was taken at a point when the building had undergone no serious renovations. The library’s interior has undergone renovations consistent with its change in use, but it retains significant character-defining features. The building maintains integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, feeling, and association. When approaching from the eastern side the building can be seen
from several blocks down, and the structure remains in the same place it was constructed, at the end of Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard (formerly Dryades Street). During its operation the library had a prominent place at the end of this important center of African American commerce.

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.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Criteria Considerations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Removed from its original location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>A birthplace or grave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>A cemetery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>A reconstructed building, object, or structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>A commemorative property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions.): Education, Ethnic Heritage: Black

Period of Significance: 1914-1965

Significant Dates:
1954- Integration of New Orleans Public Libraries
1964- Civil Rights Act Passes
1965- Dryades Branch closes as a library

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

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion D is marked above): N/A

Architect/Builder (last name, first name): Burke, William R.

Period of Significance (justification): The period of significance spans the years of the property's use as a library, 1914 to 1965.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary): N/A
**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Dryades Branch Library is significant at the local level under Criterion A, in the areas of Education and Ethnic Heritage: Black. The building was the site of expanded learning opportunities for the city’s African American population, as it was the first and, for most of its existence, only public library in New Orleans dedicated to their use. Additionally, the library’s auditorium came to serve as a gathering place for many facets for its community. The use of the structure has changed over time, and it has undergone interior renovations, but it maintains integrity of setting, location, design, and feeling. The building’s period of significance is tied to its time as a library, from its opening in 1914 to its closure in 1965.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

In the early twentieth century, American libraries were in a period of transition. The end of the nineteenth century had seen libraries move from private to public. In New Orleans, where the Public Library was founded in 1896,¹ this did little to increase access for African Americans to this aspect of education. African American access to libraries was primarily limited to alternative libraries and bookmobiles established by community and faith-based organizations.²

Concurrently, in 1890 philanthropist Andrew Carnegie began an unprecedented campaign to fund the construction of public libraries nationwide. Over the next three decades Carnegie would donate $45 million for the construction of 1,689 public library buildings.³ With cities often unwilling to fund the construction of facilities dedicated to African American use, many African American communities relied on these grants from the Carnegie Foundation.⁴

The building of the Dryades Branch Library was achieved through the Carnegie method of funding. After three Carnegie Libraries opened in New Orleans that were exclusively open to white citizens, a plan was secured for a library that would be exclusively for African Americans. This was in a large part due to John Hardy Dillard, the president of the New Orleans Library Board at the time, who was petitioned by numerous African American organizations to move the project forward.⁵

In 1915 the building, designed by architect William Burke, was opened. The Beaux-Arts architecture of the building reflected other New Orleans libraries of the time, tying the Dryades Branch library into the city’s educational context visually. The Algiers Branch Library – another Carnegie building built in 1907 – includes a similar stepped pediment, door pattern and prominent decorative quoining. The Canal Branch Library, built in 1911 and also a Burke commission, has a very similar façade layout, and is especially similar in its approach and decorative elements above the door. All three buildings feature a tripartite layout and brick construction.

The selected location of Dryades street was an important center of African American and other diverse businesses.⁶ It was adjacent to significant Jewish and Irish neighborhoods, falling towards the end of the areas running through the city that had come to be called the “immigrant belt.”⁷ The site itself fell on multiple streetcar

¹ Letter from George King Logan, Acting Librarian, to the Board of Directors of the New Orleans Public Library, 1943, New Orleans Public Library Reports, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.
³ Wiegand and Weigand, “The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South,” 21
⁵ Knott, *Not Free For All*, 2015, 70.
lines, and was adjacent to the existing African American YMCA, meaning it was already a nucleus for the community.

From the beginning, the patrons took ownership of their library. When the city was hesitant to give the opening any fanfare, members of the African American community came together to plan a grand opening for the building on October 23, 1915. In the building’s ground level auditorium there were speeches from the community, including representatives from the local churches, the legal field, medical professionals, labor organizations, universities, and business interests. Lawyer J. Madison Vance spoke on the importance of the library but pointed out the lack of books by African American authors available.

City neglect of the Dryades Branch Library would unfortunately become a pattern. Funding data from its opening through the early 1930s showed that the branch consistently received the lowest disbursements from the city. In 1925 other city libraries added an average of 1100 new books to their collection, while the Dryades Branch only added 448. Despite this, yearly reports indicate that the building was consistently well maintained, and for many years Dryades Branch was the only city library open on Sundays, keeping more hours than any of the other branches.

During its fifty years of operation the library space served many purposes. For a week in 1930 the library displayed a traveling exhibit of art by African American artists from the Harmon Foundation Collection at a well-attended event that drew both African American and white art lovers. In 1942 notable baritone Paul Robeson visited the library during a tour of New Orleans. Yearly reports and local newspaper articles indicate the library’s regular involvement in Negro History Week, a precursor to black history month.

In the day to day, in addition to providing library services, the building’s auditorium space was used for many meetings and events. In the 1930 yearly report on the New Orleans Public Library, city librarian Daniel D. Moore noted that the auditorium was "in almost constant use for meetings of various kinds." The space hosted regular meetings of the NAACP, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and numerous WPA meetings and classes. Perhaps most importantly, the library gave its community a space over which it had some degree of agency and control. In April 1932 the American Library Association met in New Orleans. African American attendees gathered at the Dryades Branch Library when they were not permitted to attended events held in segregated venues.

In 1946 a second library, the Branch Nine Library, was made available to African Americans. The library’s collection was housed first at the Valencia C. Jones Elementary School and then in surplus army huts. Like the Dryades Library, the Branch Nine Library was only given a permanent home through a private donation, this time from Nora Navara, a Jewish homemaker and avid library patron. In 1954 what had been the Branch Nine Library was given a permanent home in the newly constructed Nora Navra Branch Library. The building operated continuously until it was damaged beyond repair in 2005 by Hurricane Katrina. The library was demolished and has since reopened in a completely new building.

The Dryades Branch Library building is the only remaining library building that served the African American population during the segregation of New Orleans' public libraries. The libraries were integrated in 1954,

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8 “Site For Negro Public Library,” Times-Picayune, December 15, 1913.
9 Knott, Not Free For All, 2015, 165.
10 "Branch Library For Negro Race Ready For Use,” Times-Picayune, October 24, 1915.
11 “New Orleans Public Library Annual Report”, 1925, New Orleans Public Library Reports, Louisiana Division/City Archives.
13 Anita Johnson, Monthly Report, October 1942, HR 204, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.
15 Dryades Branch Annual Report, 1942, HR204, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.
16 Knott, Not Free For All, 2015, 167.
shortly after the Nora Navra Branch opened. In anticipation of the Brown vs. The Board of Education case that would mandate the desegregation of public schools and overturn the precedent of “separate but equal” facilities, the New Orleans Library Board worked to quietly apply these principles to the libraries. Critical to this push was Rosa E. Keller, a progressive member of the board who advocated to integrate the libraries and Albert Dent, the president of Dillard University who organized community members to lobby the board. Shortly after the Brown decision, integration of the New Orleans Libraries was achieved with little fanfare and no newspaper announcements.18

The building was in operation as a library until it was closed, officially due to damage caused by Hurricane Betsy, in 1965. Before the hurricane damage that became the reason that the library was closed, there was a desire by the city to discontinue its use. In 1964 the building was in such disrepair that the head of the New Orleans Library Board called it a “Chamber of Horrors.”19 It was noted in a newspaper article about the move to close the library that the building’s paint had begun to peel, and had plaster falling off. Lack of use was another reason cited, with city officials considering the continued maintenance of the building an unnecessary expense.

Circulation was low at the Dryades Branch in the years leading up to its closure, but this was part of a trend that spread across multiple branches.20 Additionally, low circulation may have been due in a large part to lack of resources. In the years leading up to the branch’s closure librarian Julia Coffey regularly wrote in her monthly reports on the library’s limitations due to lack of funding, and her inability to provide patrons with books they were requesting. In November 1963 she wrote that she believed “lack of books seems to be the contributing factor in the decrease of circulation for this period.”21

In 1966 the City of New Orleans sold the building, and it was privately owned until it was purchased in 1979 by the New Orleans Youth Foundation. The importance this building had to its community during its period as a library from 1915 to 1965 was effectively communicated by Anita L. Johnson, who served as a librarian at the Dryades Branch Library for more than thirty years.22 In her 1941 report Ms. Johnson wrote “Many borrowers expressed gratitude at the assistance gotten from the library. Many expressed that they would not be able to get along were it not for the library. These remarks are very gratifying. Each year the library is serving the community in a larger way.”23

### Developmental History/Additional historic context information

#### 9. Major Bibliographical Resources

**Bibliography**

Cheryl Knott, “Not Free For All, Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow” (University of Massachusetts Press, 2015)


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21 Julia Coffey, Monthly Report, November 1963, HR204, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.
23 Anita L. Johnson, Annual Narrative Report, Dryades Branch, 1941, HR 204, Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library.
Dryades Branch Library

Name of Property


Louisiana Division/City Archives, New Orleans Public Library, Librarian Reports and New Orleans Public Library Annual Reports

New Orleans Times-Picayune, various issues


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 # __________
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # __________

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): ______________

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: .1455 Acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: __________
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 29.9362  Longitude: -90.0844
2. Latitude: 29.9366  Longitude: -90.0843
3. Latitude: 29.9359  Longitude: -90.0845
4. Latitude: 29.936  Longitude: -90.0847
5. Latitude: 29.9361  Longitude: -90.0846

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)
The northeastern boundary line runs along the front of the building, parallel to Philip Street. The northwestern boundary line meets it at a right angle and runs between the nominated building and the adjacent lot. The southeastern boundary line runs along the other side of the building, parallel to the northeastern. The southwestern boundary line separates the back of the building from the empty lot behind it. The southwestern and northwestern boundary lines do not meet- their corner is cut with two additional boundary lines that run parallel to the northeastern and southwestern lines, taking a notch out of the corner.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)
This boundary contains the entirety of the nominated building and does not include any additional elements. These bounds represent the historic scope of the parcel.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Estelle Weiss-Tisman  
organization: Tulane University  
street & number: 6823 St. Charles Ave  
city or town: New Orleans    state: LA    zip code: 70118  
e-mail: eweisstisman@tulane.edu  
telephone: 732-991-6328  
date: 1/27/2020

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property’s location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)
Dryades Branch Library
Name of Property

Orleans Parish, LA
County and State
Dryades Branch Library
Name of Property

Orleans Parish, LA
County and State
Photographs
Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn’t need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: YMCA Singleton Charter School  
City or Vicinity: New Orleans, LA  
County: Orleans  
State: LA  
Name of Photographer: Estelle Weiss-Tisman  
Date of Photographs: October 30, 2019

1 of 9: Camera facing southwest and showing view of front (northeast) façade

2 of 9: Camera facing southwest and showing detail of front (northeast) façade

3 of 9: Camera facing southwest and showing interior upon entry to main floor

4 of 9: Camera facing northeast and showing interior from back of the main floor

5 of 9: Camera facing east and showing detail of main floor side wing

6 of 9: Camera facing southwest and showing detail of main floor side wing

7 of 9: Camera facing northwest and showing interior from back of the basement floor

8 of 9: Camera facing southwest and showing interior stage detail

9 of 9: Camera facing northwest and showing southeast facing side façade

10 of 9: Camera facing southeast and showing northwest facing side façade

11 of 9: Camera facing northeast and showing view of rear (southwest) façade

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.