

**Newton Community Preservation Program Grant Pre-Proposal
Newton Cultural Alliance – Nathaniel Allen Homestead
Spring 2013**

Attachment 1. Analysis of Historical Significance

The Nathaniel T. Allen Homestead at 35 Webster St., West Newton is one of the three most important architectural and cultural landmarks in Newton, the others being the Jackson Homestead and the Durant Kenrick House. Like the Jackson Homestead and Durant Kenrick, the Nathaniel T. Allen Homestead is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and has Newton Landmark status.

The Nathaniel Allen house is an excellent example of Greek Revival architecture. This style mirrored the Greek Revival Academy building that once stood at the corner of Highland and Washington streets in West Newton, which was home to the school established by Allen in 1854, the West Newton Normal School, subsequently becoming the West Newton English and Classical School. As such the home of Nathaniel Topliff Allen (1823-1903) has rich associations with the West Newton community, past and present. Allen was a colleague of Horace Mann, pioneer educator, politician and first Massachusetts Secretary of the Board of Education. Allen was widely known in the second half of the nineteenth century as an educator and abolitionist; his home is a documented site on the Underground Railroad. Allen's West Newton English and Classical School, which operated for more than fifty years was a progressive institution in its time, both co-educational and racially mixed. It pioneered one of the earliest kindergartens in the country and stressed physical education as an important part of the educational program.

Allen's home was an integral part of his school, as he and his wife boarded some of the students, some who came from such far-away places as Cuba, South America and Japan. The adjacent barn housed a gymnasium, bowling alley, and later a school room for the Misses Allen School, operated by Allen's daughters Fanny and Lucy in the first half of the twentieth-century. In 1978, the last heir left the property to Smith and Radcliffe Colleges, the First Unitarian Society in Newton and Trinity Church. A community based, nonprofit corporation formed to care for the property. Despite strong community interest, the foundation was unable to establish a viable model for its preservation. In 2012, the Nathaniel Allen house was put up for sale, and in November 2012 it was acquired by the Newton Cultural Alliance, for intended use by community arts organizations for cultural and educational programs including teaching, rehearsal, performances and gatherings.

Nathaniel Allen's legacy of educational equality and interracial cooperation continues to inspire community interest and support. In the twenty-first century, the Nathaniel Allen Homestead is poised once again to become a community center for learning and cultural activity, and with community support, preservation of the homestead will be ensured by the Newton Cultural Alliance.

Newton Community Preservation Program Grant Pre-Proposal
Newton Cultural Alliance – Nathaniel Allen Homestead
Spring 2013

Attachment 2. Description of Historically Significant Features

The fine Greek Revival house, with its bold columned façade, was bought by Nathaniel Allen in 1853 still sits on its original 1.23 acre lot. The house retains its historic residential character despite its use over time for educational purposes. Historic details, and details of the evolution of the house and adjacent barn from the late 18th century to the present are outlined in an exhaustive 90 page report entitled “A Study of the Nathaniel T. Allen House” created by graduate students in Boston University’s Preservation Studies Program, April 24, 1978. [see Addendum A photographs; Newton Historic Landmark document, Addendum B; site plans Newton Historic Landmark document and Addendum C; BU Preservation Studies Program CD with full report.]

After purchasing the house in 1854, Allen wrote in his 1855 journal that almost immediately he began to make “many betterments and improvements.” During his family’s ownership from 1853 to 1978 the house underwent several periods of construction eventually uniting separate buildings until its current configuration on the lot was achieved. The historic Greek Revival façade remains unchanged, although in need of rehabilitation; the ionic columns and triple-hung windows of the building façade on Webster St. are the most historically significant exterior features along with the lovely open space setting, i.e. gardens along Webster and Cherry Streets. The integrity of the site remains including the U-shaped drive leading to the barn, a strong link to life in mid-nineteenth century West Newton.

The academic uses of the property are not particularly evident externally. Additional sleeping rooms for boarding students and a large dining room suitable for Allen’s growing number of students was added at the back adjoining the house and barn, in the manner of other New England properties with attached outbuildings. Interior changes in the barn, however, reflected the educational programs – a gymnasium, a bowling alley, and a fine early twentieth century school room used by the Misses Allen School. Post and beam framing of the barn and early structural details are documented in the 1979 report. Internal, as well as external architectural details are also extensively documented with photographs and descriptions, which provide a road map for rehabilitation initiatives. For the interior of the house and barn, although new uses for the rooms will not follow the historic residential model, many of these details will remain as evidence of the early use. A beautifully restored Greek Revival stenciled ceiling enhances one of the original front parlors and evokes the historic spirit of the house. These 1st floor parlors will be maintained primarily as they were and be perfect settings for poetry readings, lectures and musical soirees much in the style of the Allen family’s renown.

**Newton Community Preservation Program Grant Pre-Proposal
Newton Cultural Alliance – Nathaniel Allen Homestead
Spring 2013**

Attachment 3. Summary & Justification of Proposed Treatment

It is the intent of the Newton Cultural Alliance to rehabilitate the exterior of the property and return it to coincide with the photographs of the long period during which the Allen family owned the property. In addition it is the NCA's intent to respectfully adapt the interior of the property for re-use for cultural and educational programs. Over the nearly 120 years of occupancy the Allen family undertook many renovations that we will maintain. One such example is the conversion in the early part of the 20th century of the Webster St. side of the barn to a school room. NCA also plans to remove some things that were added to make apartments possible such as the exterior circular iron stairway. In addition we also plan to remove the colonial revival side porch (ca. early 20th century) as it adds little to the building and takes away from the Greek revival original view of the side of the building from the open space grounds from Cherry Street.

Other changes will be needed to some of the lesser doorways to make the building ADA compliant as required for educational and public access. The main house doorway and stairs on the side fronting the U-shaped drive will remain as a point of egress and will be preserved for its distinctive character. The door to the barn/school room on the U-shaped drive will be made handicapped accessible as it is close to grade and is not original. In significant need of repair is the rear west wall of the barn, the roof of the barn and roof of the addition which adjoins the barn and main house. We will pay particular attention to maintain the character of the exterior of the main house, especially the facade as it fronts on Webster Street. NCA expects to apply to the Massachusetts Historical Commission among others for funds to restore windows, columns and architectural trim that continue on both sides of the house. All replacement trim, windows and doors will be undertaken to be consistent with the standards of the Secretary of the Interior for Historic Buildings and Landscapes.

Please note: As a condition of the sale of this property to the Newton Cultural Alliance, all archived materials remaining from Nathaniel Allen and his daughters were offered to the Massachusetts Historical Society. Those materials deemed either duplicative of their present holdings or not of historical importance by MHS were then offered to the archives of the Jackson Homestead. No historic documents will be kept at the Allen House though we intend to install an ongoing and rotating exhibit on the Allen period and the Nathaniel Allen legacy with the assistance of the staff of Historic Newton and the Jackson Homestead.