

**NEWTON PUBLIC BUILDINGS SURVEY
PHASE II – ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE**

Building Analysis

Auburndale Library



Address: 375 Auburn Street
Year of Construction: 1927

Level of Significance: High
Individually listed building on the National Register of Historic Places, 1990.

Recommended Treatment Level: Preservation

PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance

Building History

Also known as the Plummer Memorial Library, this was the second of five branch libraries built by citizen subscription between 1926 and 1939, and one of the only two still functioning as a libraries. The building was designed in the Tudor Revival style by the firm of Smith & Walker. It was individually listed building on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

Frederick Plummer was the Vice President of the organization to raise funds, have the library built, and donate it to the City of Newton. Plummer and his family were major contributors to the effort. The library was named in memory of Frederick's parents William Edward and Annie Howe Plummer. A 1949 addition to the building became the Annie Plummer Corey Children's Room, in memory of his sister. Two plaques on the interior walls reflect these commemorations.

Plummer, a resident of Auburndale, was a member of the Harvard class of 1888, and worked in the note brokerage business in Boston. During World War I he did Red Cross work and served in the Conservation Department of the Fuel Commission of Boston.

The library was designed by the Boston firm of Smith & Walker, with E.C. Redstone. Philip Horton Smith, a Salem resident, and member of the Harvard class of 1911, had his early training with Kilham & Hopkins. He was one of the six "pioneering Colonial Revival Salem preservationists" responsible between 1830-1930 for conceiving of and creating Pioneer Village, Salem. Smith's partner, Edgar T.P. Walker, was a Hingham resident and member of the Harvard class of 1909. He trained with "some of the nation's best", including Ralph Adams Cram. His design background was largely in Gothic Revival.

The office of Smith & Walker produced roughly 200 works of great architectural merit, with projects in five countries. Their portfolio included many of Salem's finest early 20th century landmarks, including the Hawthorne Hotel, the Salem Post Office and Grace Episcopal Church.

Six of Newton's branch libraries closed in 1991 when the main library came online. Auburndale was one of the remaining four branches, which closed on June 6, 2008. The residents had voted against raising taxes; the branch closure was part of the resulting budget cut.

Today the building is the home of the Auburndale Community Library, a non-profit library staffed by volunteers and fully funded by donations. The organization formed in 2009 after the closure of the branch library, and operates under a two-year license agreement with the City of Newton.

Level of Significance

The building is a well-designed municipal structure and is part of an important civic movement in Newton. Designed by very prominent architects. Individually listed building on the National Register.

References

- Auburndale Community Library. <http://auburndalelibrary.org/> (visited 16 November, 2011)
Harvard College Class of 1888. *Secretary's Report*, Issue 8. January, 1920. p.103.
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Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Form B NWT.2591—375 Auburn Street" (1988).
Slobodin, Lynn. "The Plummer Family of Auburndale, MA in the 1920s." (June 2009) <<http://genforum.genealogy.com/plummer/messages/2597.html>> (visited 16 November, 2011)

Phase II: Analysis of Historically Significant City Buildings, Newton, Massachusetts
Auburndale Library
DRAFT 3/9/2012

PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance: Historic Images

Part 2 – Description of Historically Significant Features

Exterior Visual Character

Setting

- The library faces east towards the corner of commercial Auburn St. and residential Ash St. The commuter rail and the Massachusetts Turnpike are directly across Auburn Street.

Shape

- One story with attic and basement, roughly “Y” shaped in plan. The west, children’s wing was added in 1948. The main (east) entry is at a low projection in the center of the “Y”.

Roof and Related Features

- Each wing has a steep gable roof. There is a shed roof at the chimney and a hipped roof at each bay window; all are clad with slate and copper flashing.
- A copper cupola with a ferrous Viking ship weathervane and slate-clad base is centered at the intersection of the three gable roofed wings.

Openings

- The typically tripartite windows with leaded glass steel casements and two sets of stacked leaded glass transoms are set within quoined cast stone surrounds. There are ornamental handles on the casement interiors.
- Ancillary door and window openings have brick flat arch lintels and brick sills.
- A projecting leaded glass bay window with a cast stone surround is centered on the south gable end.
- Most windows at the children’s wing have been replaced with hinged, steel casement sash with sensitively designed false muntins and insulated glass.
- Two 8-over-8 double-hung basement windows on east side, each within a concrete areaway; smaller basement windows are found along the other sides.
- Appropriately designed interior storm windows have been installed on all windows.
- The main entrance is contained within an elaborate cast stone surround. The original door and Tudor-arched transom have been replaced with a glass and aluminum entryway.
- The north and south entry doors have been replaced.

Projections:

- A large masonry chimney is located at the north gable end.
- The south entry portico includes a small vestibule and a wood porch, all under a slate roof.
- Concrete ramps have been added to the main (east) and south entries; there are metal railings at the main entry.
- Non-contributing corrugated plastic roofs protect the two exterior basement stairs.

Trim and Secondary Features:

- Brick buttresses with cast stone at main (east) entry

Materials

- English bond, multi-hued brick with cast stone trim: water table, window surrounds, buttress coping. Half-timbering with brick infill is located at the south gable end.

Craft Details

- Main door surround, including integrated plaque: “The Plummer Memorial Library”.
- Decorative brickwork, at half-timbered south gable end and at chimney
- Decorative rubble fieldstone and granite is located at the sides of the chimney and at various intervals above the concrete foundation, particularly below the water table.

Interior Visual Character

Individually Important Spaces

Main Reading Room

- The plaster ceiling is flat at the top and slopes at the sides, and had exposed rafters.
- The plaster walls are lined with wood bookshelves. Wood shelves separate the entry from the two reading wings, and direct traffic towards the circulation desk.
- There is a built-in wood bench at the south bay window.
- The large, wood circulation desk is carved with linenfold paneling.
- At the end of the north wing a fireplace with ornamental large-grained wood surround has a cast stone Tudor-arched opening and large, decorative andirons.
 - There is a carved wood plaque in the frieze: "Given in Love by the Children of today for the Children of tomorrow".
 - An ornate carved wood plaque is centered above the fireplace, dedicating the library to the Plummers. It is flanked by two wall sconces.
- The wood paneled interior doors with leaded glass lights leading to the hallway and office space are set within a wood architrave with an ornamental carved head.
- There is a decorative ceiling grille above the circulation desk.
- Non-original linear fluorescent fixtures are suspended from the ceiling.
- Radiators are set below the sloped interior window sills.

Annie Plummer Corey Children's Room

- The children's room is separated from the main reading room by a hall and an office, which overlooks all spaces. A small set of stairs with carved wood balusters and newels leads down from the hall.
- The textured plaster barrel-vaulted ceiling acts as a whispering gallery.
- The textured plaster walls are lined with bookshelves; the lowest shelf is sloped upwards for better visibility and access to the books.
- There is a built-in wood bench at the north bay window.
- The floor is carpeted.
- The interior of the original south window lead comes have been painted white; the north and west windows are replacements.
- The minimal wood trim, at the barrel vault springline and surrounding the office window and hall doorway has a light stain to match the shelves.
- Radiators are set below the windows, and are protected by screened enclosures.
- A wood dedication plaque is hung on the west wall: "Given in her memory by her brother Frederick Plummer in the year 1949"

Related Spaces

Main Entry Vestibule

- The flat ceiling and slightly bowed side walls are plaster; the rubber flooring is not original.
- Paneled wood closet doors and paneled wood screen doors to the main space appear to be original.

Children's Room Entry Vestibule

- The ceiling and walls are both textured plaster; the rubber flooring is not original.
- The space is currently used for storage of children's chairs.
- The plywood exterior door has a frosted vision panel.

Other Significant Interior Features

- The basement is filled with bookshelves and used by the Newton Library for book sales.
- The small, habitable second floor is currently used for storage.

Part 2 – Images



Figure 1 (top left):
typical set of windows

Figure 2 (top right):
south gable end. Note
the bay window and
the decorative
brickwork within a
half-timbered
framework.

Figure 3 (center): Main
reading room, looking
southeast. The
circulation desk is to
the right.

Figure 4 (bottom):
Children's room,
looking southeast.

Part 3 – Treatment Recommendations

Preservation Treatment Level

The Auburndale Library is a significant building within the City of Newton, and it continues to serve its original function as a local library. Overall it is in very good condition and retains the majority of its original design features and materials. It is recommended that any work on the exterior and in the significant spaces on the interior be performed according to the “Preservation” level of treatment, as outlined in the U.S. Secretary of the Interior’s *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. The Preservation treatment level places a premium on the retention of all historic fabric through conservation, maintenance and repair.

In ancillary spaces not directly contributing to the historic character, the “Rehabilitation” level of treatment may be more appropriate. At this level, the emphasis is placed on protecting and maintaining historic building material and significant features while providing an efficient contemporary use of the building.

The following bulleted list contains an analysis of existing conditions and recommended treatments for the significant features catalogued in Part 2 of this report.

Exterior Recommendations

Critical/Urgent (Timeframe: As soon as possible)

- Replace missing gutters and reattach leaders, typical at full building perimeter. Review rainwater management strategy to ensure water drains away from building. Replace rusting, ferrous gutter brackets with copper.
- Secure roof enclosure where slate and underlayment are missing, west elevation

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Replace copper step flashing and counterflashing where it has uplifted.
- Replace broken or missing slates, including at south gable bay window.
- Remove rust and repaint all ferrous elements, including weathervane, steel window lintels, steel grates at concrete areaways, handrails, pipe rails, north entry wall sconce, non-contributing roof over basement stairs.
- Replace rusting exposed conduit with non-ferrous or stainless steel, if still needed.
- Remove ivy.
- Repair, resecure, or replace deteriorated wood elements as necessary, including the wood soffits. Repaint all wood elements, including at west gable and wood basement windows.
- Conduct thorough survey of window condition, including sash, frame, lintel and hardware. Clean and repaint steel windows. Restore to functioning if not. Replace missing and mismatched panes and missing muntins, including at wood basement windows.
- Repair or replace deteriorated plywood veneer at water-damaged bottom of south door.
- Repair spalling vertical crack in concrete foundation at intersection with south basement stair retaining wall.
- Determine cause of severe water damage at north concrete stair, resulting in spalling, crumbling concrete at the stairs, efflorescence below, and exposed rebar at the underside of concrete landing. Remediate the cause and rebuild the concrete base to the stairs.
- Investigate source of water damage, including cracking and spalling, at concrete foundation and retaining walls of north and south basement stairs. Remedy cause as necessary. Pin or patch cracks as necessary. These stairs are somewhat protected by non-original roofs and are otherwise in good condition.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Some lead windows appear to be bowing; monitor condition. Reset or reinforce as necessary.

- Clean building exterior, including:
 - rust staining: below ferrous elements, including at south basement stair
 - biological growth, including moss: at shaded locations including west water table, slate roof, areaways and exterior stairs; below missing gutters and leaders
 - efflorescence: at exterior stairs; few other, scattered locations
 - atmospheric staining and soot, particularly at top of chimney
 - general staining, including at water tables

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Continue regular maintenance of character-defining features.
- Maintain all gutters, leaders and drains to keep clog-free.

Interior Recommendations

Critical/Urgent (Timeframe: As soon as possible)

- Repair roof to remedy cause of water damage at sloped ceiling of main reading room, above the main entry, and in the main entry vestibule.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Reset cast stone at fireplace opening; movement and cracks at joints suggest settling. Confirm that this shift is no longer active.
- Patch plaster and repaint water-damaged ceilings above main entry and in the main entry vestibule, after first remedying the cause, see above.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Replace the missing wood dentil at the fireplace surround.
- Review lighting strategy for more appropriate, energy efficient solution. While the functionality of the non-original linear fluorescent fixtures is fine, their placement is not visually compatible with the windows or the ceiling trusses.
- Interior door exhibits strange discoloration of wood finish. Refinish.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Continue regular maintenance of character-defining features.