

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

Building Analysis

Brigham House Community Center



Address: 20 Hartford Street
Year of Construction: 1883

Level of Significance: Moderate

Recommended Treatment Level: Rehabilitation

PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance

Building History

The Queen Anne style house at 20 Hartford Street that is now the Brigham House Community Center was built as a private residence. The house was built for Boston salesman Louis K. Brigham, who had bought several lots along Hartford Street in the rapidly developing neighborhood of Newton Highlands as a speculative investment. . The 1881 City Directory lists Brigham as living on Woodward Street, but the 1883 Directory lists his residence as a house on Hartford Street near Lincoln Street. Eight dwellings, including Brigham's house were constructed on Hartford Street between 1883 and 1884. It has been speculated that Louis was related to Edward L. Brigham, the founder of Brigham's Ice Cream, but a direct link has not been found.

Sometime between 1901 and 1903 the house was sold to Dr. and Mrs. Frederick S. Keith; the Keiths had previously lived down the street at 10 Hartford Street. Dr. Keith was a prominent Harvard-trained (M. D. class of 1892) homoeopathic physician. The Keiths lived in this house for many years. By 1929 their children had grown and moved to their own homes within the neighborhood. By 1934, Mrs. Keith had presumably passed away; only Dr. Keith was listed at the residence.

From January 1908 until the early 1950s, the local branch of the Newton Library was located in the newly constructed Hyde School. By 1951 the Hyde School needed more classroom space and the Library Board was requested to find space elsewhere. The city purchased Dr. Keith's home at 20 Hartford Street for this purpose. A one-story reading room extension was added to the original house, which opened to the public on May 11, 1958. Its construction was funded by a city appropriation and the will of Marion B. Morse, a member of the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, a group who had long advocated for Newton Highlands to have a library of its own. The extension was designed by architect and Newton Centre resident W. Cornell Appleton and was constructed by Newton Highlands contractor Gerald A. Foley. Appleton was also responsible for the design of the Nonantum branch library.

In 1997 the city planned to sell house to a law firm when the Newton Youth Commission asked to instead use the building as a youth center. The city leased the building to the Brigham House, which opened in 2001 as a gathering place for teens. It underwent a recent renovation and reopened in 2009.

Level of Significance

20 Hartford Street is a contributing structure within the Newton Highlands National Historic District. The building is significant under Criterion A for its association with the development of Newton. It is also significant under Criterion C as a relatively intact example of the Queen Anne style. The building retains a high degree of architectural integrity despite being somewhat altered by its conversion from residential to institutional use.

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PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance: Historic Images



Figure 1: Side elevation of 20 Hartford Street circa 1997 (Credit: Historic Newton).



Figure 2: Front elevation of 20 Hartford Street circa 1997 (Credit: MACRIS).

Part 2 – Description of Historically Significant Features

Exterior Visual Character

Setting

- Located near the end of Hartford Street, where the residential street adjoins the commercial center of Newton Highlands. A parking lot wraps around the (northeast) side and rear. The back of the property overlooks MBTA train tracks.

Shape

- Three-story building roughly cross-shaped in plan with asymmetrical façades.
- A one-story addition constructed in 1958 is located at the rear (south) and west elevations.

Roof and Related Features

- The building has a steeply pitched roof of irregular shape with a dominant front-facing gable. The roof is clad in asphalt shingles, likely a replacement for either slate or wood shingles. The roof consists of cross-gables, but there is a portion of the roof at the street (north) elevation (behind the front gable) that has a hipped roof form. A dormer window and triangular skylight are present at the side of the cross gable roof at the north elevation.
- Two thin masonry chimneys protrude from the roof near the center of the building.
- A built-in wood gutter is located at the building eaves. Leaders are painted aluminum.
- The one-story rear addition has a flat roof.

Openings

- In keeping with the Queen Anne style, the building has a variety of opening shapes and sizes. Window openings typically contain wood single two-over-two or one-over-one double hung sashes or fixed sashes.
- The wood main entrance door with large vision panel appears to be a modern replacement. A sidelight with a glazed upper panel and wood lower panel is located adjacent to the door opening.
- An additional entrance door is located at the south elevation at the rear addition.

Projections

- The building has a one-story partial porch at the main entrance with a pedimented roof and other decorative wood detailing.
- A modern ramp made of wood with aluminum railings has been constructed to access the entrance at the side of the main stairs.
- A small canopy roof is located over the south entrance.
- The building wall is pulled back from the roof line at the one side of the second floor of the west elevation to create a small covered porch.

Trim and Secondary Features:

- The building has a simple wood fascia and cornice, corner boards and wood belt coursing.
- The cornice extends across the gable ends to form pediments.
- The second floor projects beyond the first floor and is flared at each corner. Decorative wood brackets are located below the projection at many locations.
- Dentils are present along the first floor fascia board at the bay adjacent to the main entrance.

Materials

- The walls are clad with a combination of wood clapboard siding and shingles. The majority of the wall field is clapboards, but cut shingles are located at the flared base of the second floor and patterned shingles are installed within the pedimented gable ends.
- A stone foundation is present along the base of the building.

Craft Details

- The building has numerous decorative wood elements such as brackets, porch supports.
- The decorative shingles in the gable ends are a mix of diamond and scalloped shapes.
- The tympanum at the first floor porch pediment has a carved sun motif.

Interior Visual Character

Individually Important Spaces

First Floor Parlor

- At the west side of the building is a polygonal parlor space. The space is clearly one of the central rooms of the original house, but was somewhat modified when incorporated into the 1958 addition. The parlor area has a fireplace with a brick surround and wood mantelpiece and a decorative wood floor with a border that wraps around the irregular perimeter of the room.

Related Spaces

Entrance Hall and Main Staircase

- The entrance hall has its original door casing and wood floor. The main staircase has an elaborate newel post and turned wood banisters. The banisters and wood rail continue and wrap around the curved landing at the second floor.

Other Significant Interior Features

- Original wood window and door casings, and baseboards are present in the majority of the interior rooms.
- Many original wood doors remain and retain their original hardware.
- Metal floor registers for the heating system are surrounded by a marble border.
- A large arched opening divides the second floor stair corridor in two.

Part 2 – Images



Figure 3: Decorative exterior details include brackets with finials, supporting the roof edges and patterned shingles at the gable ends.



Figure 4: Ornamented front porch with a new accessible ramp added to side.



Figure 5: Vestiges of the house's years as a branch library still remain, such as this sign and bookcase.



Figure 6: Original interior staircase in good condition.

Part 3 – Treatment Recommendations

Recommended Treatment Level

The Brigham house's exterior has been restored in 2009, and the majority of materials found on the exterior of the building are currently in good condition. The interior has been altered to support the building's past role as a library and present role as a community center, but retains a fair amount of its character-defining material. The recommended treatment for the Brigham House is the "Rehabilitation" level of treatment outlined in the U. S. Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. The Rehabilitation treatment level assumes that more repair and replacement of historic material will be required than a more preservation-based approach. The emphasis is placed on protecting and maintaining historic building material and significant features while providing an efficient contemporary use of the building. Future renovations to the building should strive to maintain the residential appearance of the exterior and the overall arrangement of the interior rooms. Significant features listed in Part 2 should be protected as much as possible.

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)

- A portion of the roofing and aluminum drip edge at the north side of the west gable roof has lifted. This condition should be repaired to prevent water from getting below the roof shingles.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Replace or repair the rusting bulkhead door at the south elevation.
- Paint at the first floor entrance porch floor and the entrance stair treads and risers is worn away, exposing bare wood. The floor should be repainted to protect the wood.
- Some joints at the stone foundation are open or cracked and should be repointed.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Peeling paint was noted at a few isolated areas on the exterior wood cladding, particularly at the shingles below the second floor windows. The exterior paint should be monitored and repainted when required.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Continue regular maintenance of exterior character-defining features.

Interior Recommendations

Critical/Urgent (Timeframe: As soon as possible)

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Wood floors at the second floor are worn and scratched and should be refinished.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Continue regular maintenance of interior character-defining features.
- Alterations should protect and preserve as much of the existing historic building fabric and overall arrangement of the major interior spaces as possible.