NEWTON PUBLIC BUILDINGS SURVEY
PHASE II – ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Building Analysis

Burr Park Field House

Address: 142 Park Street
Year of Construction: 1919

Level of Significance: High

Recommended Treatment Level: Rehabilitation

PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance

Building History

The Burr Park Fieldhouse is a one-story Colonial Revival-style structure located within Burr Park. The building is constructed of brick with wood trim. The structure is dominated by a large hipped roof that extends past the building walls and over two open brick arched pavilions located at either side of the main building. Terraces at the north elevation tie the building in to the surrounding park landscape.

The land for Burr Park was donated to the City of Newton in approximately 1918 by the seven children of Isaac T. and Ann F. Burr. The 5.12-acre site included the elder Burrs' house and several outbuildings which were demolished for the construction of the park and playground. The construction of the park was part of a large wave of park-building within Newton that began in the 1890s. Allston Burr, one of Isaac and Ann's children along with former Newton mayor Herman Burr, was involved with the creation of the park beyond the initial donation of land and contributed funds for the new park design and for the construction of the fieldhouse.

The landscape architect hired to design the park was Arthur A. Shurtleff (1870-1857). Shurtleff is more commonly known as Arthur Shurcliff, as he changed his name in 1930 to revert to the Old English spelling. Shurcliff graduated from MIT with an engineering degree in 1894 and went on to do graduate work in landscape architecture at Harvard. In 1896 he became an apprentice in Frederick Law Olmsted's firm in Brookline, Massachusetts where he remained as an employee until leaving to begin his own office in 1905. Shurcliff is most well known as the chief landscape architect for the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in the 1920s. He was also responsible for the design of Boston's Charles River Esplanade in 1935.

The fieldhouse was constructed at the same time as the surrounding park and was designed by Salem resident William G. Rantoul (1867-1949). Rantoul (not to be confused with his brother Augustus N. Rantoul, principal of the prominent Boston firm Andrews, Jacques and Rantoul) was a well-known designer noted for his residential work in the Colonial Revival Style. He was particularly active along Massachusetts' North Shore, and was responsible for the design of the Salem Athenaeum in addition to numerous residential works.

Level of Significance

The Burr Park fieldhouse is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the development and expansion of Newton's park system. It is also significant under Criterion C as an elegant and largely intact example of architect William G. Rantoul and as an important feature within a park landscape designed by noted landscape architect Arthur Shurcliff.

References

Heath, Richard. "Two Special Reports of the Parks Department 1924 and 1925: Introduction", Franklin Park Coalition (1981).

Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Form B NWT.918—Burr Park" (1987).

Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Form B NWT.5824—Park Street" (1997).

Massachusetts Historical Society. "Biographical Sketch of Arthur Asahel Shurcliff, 1870-1957" (2003). <http://www.masshist.org/findingaids/doc.cfm?fa=fa0023> (Visited 23 February, 2012).

Schuler, Gretchen G., Anne M. Forbes and Betsy Friedberg. "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: Historic Farms and Rural Retreats of Topsfield, Massachusetts". United States Department of the Interior (2005).

PART I - Additional Resources and Historic Images

Additional Information Sources for Future Research
Manuscript Collections of the Peabody Essex Museum. This collection contains many of the architectural drawings of William G. Rantoul.

The Arthur Asahel Shurcliff Papers (1865-1957) at the Massachusetts Historical Society. This collection contains the personal and professional correspondence of Arthur Shurcliff.

Historic Images

Figure 1: Photo of Field House, c. 1925. (Credit: Historic Newton)

Part 2 – Description of Historically Significant Features

Exterior Visual Character

Setting

- The Fieldhouse is sited on a slight slope, along the wooded southern edge of the open playing fields of Burr Playground.
- Stepped terraces at the south elevation of the building connect the building to the playing fields.

Shape

- Strictly symmetrical one story structure with a basement/crawlspace. There is an extension at the center of the rear (south) elevation, and two projecting side bays at the front (north) elevation.
- Two open side pavilions with arched doorways connect the lower front terrace to the playground in the rear.

Roof and Related Features

- Prominent hipped roof with exposed wood rafter tails extends over the main building and the two front extensions. The roof is currently clad in asphalt shingles, but was originally slate.
- Gable roofs are connected to the main roof and cover the side pavilions and rear extension.
- There is a large masonry chimney present at main roof.
- Gutters were originally located at the sides of the hipped and gable roofs. Replacement aluminum gutters are present at some locations are not consistently in place. Leaders are missing at most locations.

Openings

- Windows are typically tripartite, with double-hung sash of varying widths.
    - An opening with a 6-over-6 sash flanked by two 2-over-2 sashes is centered on the north face of each of the two projecting side bays at the front elevation. The inward-facing side of each projecting bay originally had a 6-pane window; this opening at the east side is now infilled with scored stucco.
    - An opening with an 8-over-8 sash flanked by two 4-over-4 sashes is located at each side elevation. These windows are centered over basement-level window openings consisting of a 4-over-4 sash flanked by two 2-over-2 sashes.
    - A tripartite window of three 6-over-6 sashes is located at each side of the rear elevation. Next to these openings are narrow, single-pane casement windows.
    - The door on the south side of the rear extension is flanked by two openings with 4-over-4 sashes.
- Windows typically retain the original wood sashes and steel lintels. Metal grilles over the windows obscure the view of the sash. Historic photographs show that the window openings typically had wood shutters. These shutters are no longer extant.
- A shallow curved bay window with 45 lights is prominently centered on the north elevation.
- Door openings typically contain single doors and have arched brick lintels. The original doors filled the entire arched opening and had glass lights at the upper door area. All remaining door openings now have replacement aluminum doors and infill aluminum or plywood transom panels in the arched areas.
- The original tall door opening at the rear elevation has been modified to fit a shorter replacement door with brick infill overhead.
- Windows into the crawlspace between the upper and lower terraces have been infilled with stucco.

Projections:

- The open side pavilions have free-standing wing walls at north elevation.

Trim and Secondary Features:

- Decorative cast stone units are set into the top and sides of the arched door and pavilion openings.
- Painted wood trim is located at the windows and roofline.
- The original metal railing is still in place at the upper terrace at the north elevation. Non-original chain link fencing has been installed at the lower terrace

Materials

- The brick at the walls is laid in Flemish bond. The brick continues all the way to grade with no visible foundation.
- Cast stone units are present at the keystone and springlines of the arched door and window openings. Cast stone is also used as trim at the side pavilions and as the coping stones of the freestanding wing walls.
- Cast iron railing at upper level of concrete front porch.

Craft Details

- Decorative curved bricks form hoods and sills at the rear extension windows and doors.
- Wood "brackets" are present at the rear extension gable ends, side pavilions, and inner faces of front extensions. The edges of the exposed roof brackets are decoratively carved.

Interior Visual Character

Individually Important Spaces

- The interior is one large space with secondary storage/utility rooms. It has been extensively modified from its original configuration and very little of its historic features remain.

Other Significant Interior Features

- There are some original wood window and door casings within the interior space.
- Walls have been covered with wood paneling and the ceiling is acoustic tile. It is possible some original finishes or features may be present below these more modern finishes.

Part 2 – Images

Figure 2: the prominent roof overhang with a wood fascia and beadboard sheathing is supported by rafter tails that wrap the corners of the roof.

Figure 3: A false exposed purlin visually supports the gable ends.

Figure 4: the original 45-pane wood bow Window at the center of the north façade is still intact, although covered with a metal grate.

Figure 5: The rounded arch doorways with cast stone keystones and springline are also present within the pavilions. Note also the painted beadboard ceiling and rafters.in the lower east corner.

Part 3 – Treatment Recommendations

Preservation Treatment Level

The Burr Park Fieldhouse has not been continuously maintained and is not being used to its full capacity. It has the appearance of an abandoned building within the park. While a great deal of original historic material remains it is frequently in poor condition and will be lost if the building continues to be neglected. Significant repair work is required to prevent further deterioration of the masonry and wood elements. To allow the fieldhouse to serve a new use and remain a valuable resource for the City of Newton it is recommended that future work be performed according to 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 is called for in 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.

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)

- Repair damaged gutters and replace all missing gutters and leaders to make the roof drainage system functional and ensure rainwater is not draining over wood and masonry surfaces.
- Investigate all signs of water damage at the interior and at the wood of the exterior soffit to determine cause and if still active. Remedy the source of damage.
- Close in holes at areas of damaged wood at the soffit where birds are entering into the building.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Steel lintels at the majority of the window openings are rusted and are causing the surrounding brick to crack. In some instances the cracks caused by this rust jacking travel all the way to the building corners. Many of the steel lintels need to be replaced, all need to be repainted. Rebuild areas of displaced bricks where rust jacking has occurred and where removed to replace lintels.
- Replace cracked bricks below the side wing window sills.
- Rebuild cracked and displaced freestanding wing walls at north elevation.
- Repair or replace the cracked and spalling concrete retaining walls at the east elevation.
- Repair the wood soffit and decorative brackets. Repairs include:
    - Complete removal of existing paint from wood surfaces. It is recommended that paint analysis be performed prior to stripping to identify historic paint colors.
    - Installation of new wood dutchmen with profiles matching the existing wood elements at areas of severe deterioration. Replacement of wood elements in-kind at areas of deterioration that are not repairable.
    - Consolidation at areas of less severely deteriorated wood.
    - Repainting wood surfaces.
- Repair or replace the concrete terrace walking surfaces and stairs.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Clean and repoint the masonry 100%. Remove paint that has been applied over the brick at areas of graffiti.
- Remove extraneous ferrous elements from building exterior. Patch as required
- Conduct thorough survey of window conditions, including sash, frame, lintel and hardware. The original windows should be retained to the largest extent possible, repaired and made

weathertight. Replace damaged or missing wood elements in kind. Areas of minor deterioration should be repaired with dutchmen or through consolidation. Glazing putty will need to be replaced. The wood should be stripped and repainted in a color matching the original color. Windows that are too deteriorated to repair should be replaced in kind.

- Scrape and repaint the metal handrails at the stairs and upper terrace.
- Remove or scrape and repaint the metal grilles over the windows.
- Re-evaluate the lighting strategy at the building and how the electrical service is entering the structure. The way that the current light fixtures and electrical service box have been mounted to the building has damaged the decorative wood elements at the east elevation. Repair the damaged wood areas.
- Remove the unsightly chain link fence at the lower terrace and replace with a more historically appropriate railing.
- Consider replacing the missing wood window shutters.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Develop a regular maintenance plan with the intent to preserve character-defining features.
- Maintain all gutters, leaders and drains to keep clog-free.

Interior Recommendations

Critical/Urgent (Timeframe: As soon as possible)

- Locate and repair source of water damage at interior.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Investigate if additional historic features or materials are present below the existing contemporary finishes. As the space is renovated consider how these features can be retained or preserved.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Develop a regular maintenance plan with the intent to preserve character-defining features.