

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

Building Analysis

Carr School



Address: 255 Nevada Street
Year of Construction: 1934

Level of Significance: Moderate

Recommended Treatment Level: Rehabilitation

PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance

Building History

The Carr School, located at 225 Nevada Street in the Newtonville neighborhood of Newton was constructed in 1934/35. The school was one of several school buildings constructed within Newton in the late 1920s through 1930s in response to the rapid population growth the city experienced beginning in the mid-1800s. After World War I, a period of time that saw limited public building construction, the need for new schools had become particularly acute. Eventually, fourteen new school buildings were constructed in Newton between 1919 and 1939 to meet this increased need¹. The Carr School was designed in a very spare version of the Georgian Revival style and is unusual in that it incorporates Art-deco elements within its design. The building is primarily red brick, with long wings flanking a central pavilion. The front façade of the central pavilion is constructed of tan brick with an unusual mixture of limestone, cast stone and wood decorative elements. An elaborate wood and copper cupola rises from the roof of the center pavilion.

Ralph Coolidge Henry, architect of the Carr School, had been a senior associate in the firm of Guy Lowell, a nationally prominent architect and landscape architect responsible for works such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. After Lowell's death in 1927, Henry, along with another senior associate, Henry P. Richmond, took over Lowell's work as the architectural firm of Henry and Richmond². Henry and Richmond had already designed two schools for Newton, the Tudor Revival Hamilton School in 1928 and the Neo-gothic Weeks Junior High School in 1930³. By the time of construction of the "Nevada Street School" Henry was the head of a firm bearing his own name based at 11 Beacon Street in Boston. The school was originally going to be named the Wheeler School after the contemporary school Superintendent, but the dedication was changed after the unexpected death of Fred Carr, a well-loved Newton educator and the principal of the Weeks Junior High School⁴.

In 1966 an addition containing one small and one large gymnasium was added to the northwest side of the original building. The addition, in the International Style, was designed by the Boston firm Smith, Sellev & Doherty. Other works by Smith, Sellev and Doherty include the Oak Street School in Taunton and the Bancroft School in Worcester⁵.

The Carr School was decommissioned and closed by the Newton School Department in 1979, a period of time in which the school age population of Newton was contracting. The City sold the building to the League School, a private non-profit school for autistic children, in 1981. The purchase and sale agreement included a provision that allowed the City to opt to repurchase the building after a 15-year period⁶. The League School performed limited interior renovations in 1987 with the help of the Winchester, MA firm Stirling/Brown Architects. In 1999, as part of its long-term school planning, the City chose to exercise its repurchase option and re-acquired the building. Since 2004 the building has been the home of the Newton Cultural Center, a cluster of arts and cultural organizations.

Level of Significance

The Carr School is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the rapid expansion of the Newton Public School system in 1920s and 1930s. It is also significant under Criterion C for its unusual variation on the Georgian Revival style. The building maintains a high degree of architectural integrity.

¹ Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Form B NWT.3606—225 Nevada St" (1987), 2.

² James P. Gallagher, *A Beacon of Tradition: The Complete History of the Grosse Pointe Yacht Club* (Kelvin Publishing, 1986), 127.

³ Historic American Buildings Survey, "John Wingate Weeks Junior High School, Hereward & Rowena Streets, Newton Center, Middlesex, MA (HABS No. MA-1121)" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1981), 7.

⁴ Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Form B NWT.3606—225 Nevada St" (1987).

⁵ *Boston Globe* "St. John Smith, 76 Retired Architect." January 8, 1987.

⁶ *Boston Globe*. "Making (Up) History" January 18, 1998.

PART I – Additional Resources and Historic Images

Additional Information Sources for Future Research

Ralph Coolidge Henry Papers, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Library.
The collection includes correspondence, subject files, photographs, and architectural plans for Henry projects and clients from 1940-1952, including the Nevada Street School in Newton, MA.

Historic Images

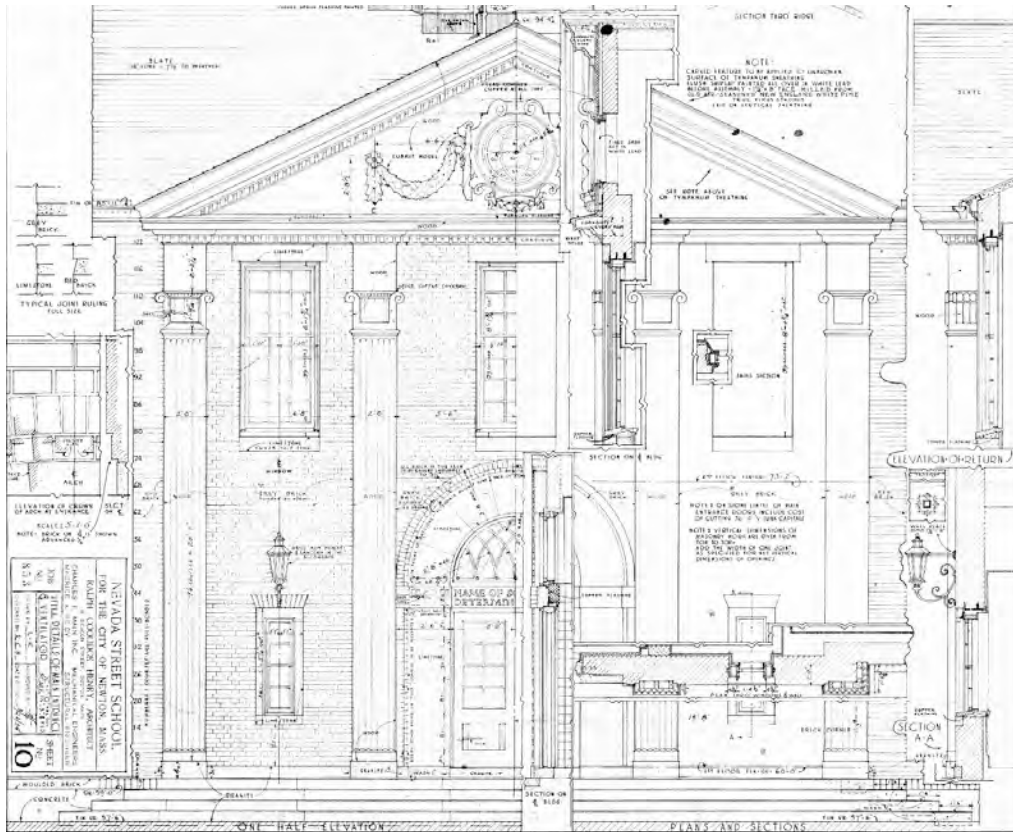


Figure 1: Excerpt from original 1934 construction drawings with a detail of the entrance pavilion. Note the wood carving at the pediment that was never constructed. The drawings specify that the pilasters should be constructed from wood. It is unclear why they were eventually made from cast stone (Credit: Newton Public Buildings Department).



Figure 2: The Carr School in 1987 when it was owned by the private League School (Credit: Massachusetts Historical Society).

PART 2 – Description of Historically Significant Features

Significant Exterior Features

Setting

- Large open lot set within a residential neighborhood. Extensions and additions are largely hidden from of the street.

Shape

- Strictly symmetrical street-facing (east) elevation centered on a slightly projected central bay with a wood pediment. This symmetry is representative of its style (Georgian Revival).

Roof and Related Features

- Series of moderately-pitched hipped roof forms at the original building clad in slate shingles with copper flashing, gutters and leaders. The roof fascia is wood, largely hidden from view behind the gutters.
- Elaborate cupola at the center of the main roof with a copper pinnacle with stylized stripes. The walls of the cupola are wood with eight freestanding columns, each of which is topped with a small copper pinnacle consisting of an obelisk sitting on three round balls. The base of the cupola is wood with raised corner quoins.

Openings

- Windows retain their original wood casing, sills and double- or triple-hung sashes. Windows openings are typically tall and regularly spaced.
- The main entrance retains its original wood casing and semi-circular wood transom with decorative tracery. The entrance is set within a smooth arched limestone surround with Art-Deco detailing and further surrounded by a pattern of raised and recessed brick. The entrance doors are non-historic aluminum replacements.
- Ocular window with tracery at the center of the wood pediment.
- Secondary entrances retain their original wood casing (with replacement doors) and are set within tan brick surrounds with limestone caps and limestone decorative elements.

Projections:

- The south end of the building extends towards the rear of the site. The first floor of this extension has a rounded projecting bay window at the south wall.

Trim and Secondary Features:

- The design of the building is typically spare with limited trim.
- The wood pediment at the center bay has carved dentils at the horizontal and raking cornices.
- There are four fluted cast stone pilasters at the central entrance bay with wood capitals.
- A molded brick course is located at the base of the wall at the entire perimeter, above the concrete foundation.
- Entrances typically have granite steps and landings and iron railings.

Materials

- The walls are typically red brick with an alternating course of header and stretchers every 6th course. The header bricks are typically a dark yellow/brown.
- Buff-colored brick at the central entrance bay containing the limestone door surround and limestone windows sills and lintels. The central bay has a granite base.

Craft Details

- The wooden capitals at the central bay are carved with a stylized, Art-Deco influenced Corinthian design containing an image of an open book at the center
- Patterned bronze grilles are located high in the wall at several locations on the building. Below each grille is a swag design of a wreath and lantern made of raised bricks. The “light” of each raised brick lantern is made from two of the yellow header bricks.
- Carved limestone tablets are set in the blank end walls at each side of the street elevation.
- Original wrought-iron exterior light fixtures are located at either side of the main entrance door.

Significant Interior Features

Individually Important Spaces

Main entrance vestibule and lobby area.

- Vaulted plaster ceiling at main entrance vestibule.
- Original metal clad doors and semi-circular transom at the interior side of the entrance vestibule.
- Vaulted plaster ceiling at the lobby area.
- Tan ceramic tiles at the walls of the lobby and entrance vestibule with black ceramic covered tiles at the base of the wall. The tiles extend to just above the doors.

Auditorium

- Wood wainscot at the perimeter of the room and wood pilasters set into the wall adjacent to each door opening as well as a fluted wood surround at the stage area.
- The doors at the north and south walls have elaborate casings with stylized lintels.
- Stepped plaster detailing at the perimeter of the ceiling.
- Light wood flooring typical of the 1930s.

Corridors and staircases

- The main corridors and staircases are designed as a flow of space rather than separate objects. The staircases are enclosed with glass and metal panels rather than walls to provide maximum visibility of the stairs from within the corridors and to allow light from the exterior windows in the stairwells to enter the corridors.
- Metal and glass partitions with geometric mullion patterns at each stairwell containing original metal clad doors with vision lights. A typical detail of the 1920s and 1930s.
- Iron railings at stairs with wood handrails.
- Original wood doors, divided-light transoms and wood door casing at each door opening into the corridors. The doors are glazed with opaque glass except for one clear pane at the center of the vision panel.
- Built-in display cases at the corridor walls with wood casing.
- The tan ceramic tiles found in the lobby extend into the first and second floor corridors and stairwells. The corridor tiles are located at the bottom half of the wall only with a row of tiles surrounding the door casing of each corridor door.
- Original patterned flooring at the second floor corridor— pink and black linoleum tiles in a faux marble pattern with a dark border at the perimeter of the hall.

Other Significant Interior Features

- Classrooms at the second floor retain their original configuration, with the blackboards along the corridor wall and built-in closets at the walls between rooms. Many classrooms also retain their original wood baseboard and wood cove molding.

PART 2 –Images



Figure 3: Central entrance bay with its mix of masonry and wood elements.



Figure 4: Close up of cupola.



Figure 5: Grille and associated brick swag detail.



Figure 6: Metal clad partition and doors between first floor corridor and stairwell.

Part 3 – Treatment Recommendations

Recommended Treatment Level

Due to the long period of time that the building has not been intensively used and the poor condition of many of the original materials it is recommended that future work at the Carr School 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 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)

- Inspect condition of roof and flashing. Repair as necessary. Replace broken slates and damaged gutters and leaders.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- The roof should be replaced, salvaging as much sound slate as possible. Install new underlayment and copper flashing, gutters and leaders and reinstall slate.
- Repairs to copper elements at cupola.
- Conduct thorough survey of window condition, including sash, frame, lintel and hardware. The existing windows, including the decorative transom over the main entrance and the ocular window in the pediment, should be retained to the largest extent possible, repaired and made weathertight. Deteriorated elements such as the sills should be replaced in kind and 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.
- In addition to the windows address rotted and damaged wood elements at the cupola, pediment and column capitals at the main entrance, fascia, and rounded bay window at the south wall. 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 the concrete supports at the steps and landings at all entrances. This will require the removal of the granite units at the steps and landings, which should be reset on the new supports. All abandoned railing ends should be removed from the stone and the holes patched. Original railings should be removed, scraped free of rust, repainted and reinstalled. If modifications need to be made to the stairs and landings for code reasons as much of the original granite and iron elements should be retained as possible. Added elements should be of compatible materials and harmonious with the original design.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- The brick, limestone, granite and cast stone elements should be cleaned 100%. The base of the building, joints between stone and cast stone units and other areas of eroded joints should be repointed.

- Small losses in the limestone and granite elements should be repaired with a composite patching material. Larger losses should be repaired with stone dutchmen.
- Non-historic exterior doors should be replaced with new doors that are more sensitive to the original design.
- Broken bricks should be replaced in kind and the brick course should be repointed.
- The cast stone pilasters should be cleaned and repointed. The wood capitals should be restored and repainted in the same manner as the pediment above. As much of the original material of the carved elements should be maintained as possible.

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)

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- The flooring at the second floor corridor should be replaced. Replacing the floor with new tile matching the configuration and pattern of the existing floor is highly recommended.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Replace the glazing putty at the metal clad partitions and doors at each stairwell.
- Replace the glazing putty at the wood classroom and office doors.
- As part of the restoration of the auditorium space the wood elements should be stripped and repainted. It is recommended that paint analysis be performed prior to paint removal to determine the historic colors used in the space. The acoustic tile at the field of the ceiling should be removed and the plaster repaired. The existing floor should be refinished.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Continue regular maintenance of character-defining features. Elements that become deteriorated should be replaced in kind.
- Alterations should be sensitive to the original design and should strive to retain as much of the original material still present as possible. Spatial relationships between the major interior spaces should be preserved. When replacing elements where the historic materials have previously been removed, such as the first floor corridor flooring, which has been replaced with vinyl, consider replacement with a design in keeping with the original design.