

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

Building Analysis

Fire Department Headquarters



Address: 1164 Centre Street
Year of Construction: 1928

Level of Significance: High
Eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places

Recommended Treatment Level: Preservation/Rehabilitation

PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance

Building History

The building, designed in the Classical Revival style by architects Kendall, Taylor & Company, was constructed in 1928 as the fire alarm headquarters for the City of Newton. It still serves as the headquarters for the Newton Fire Department.

The Cataract Engine Company at the Lower Falls was the oldest fire organization in Newton; their fire apparatus, purchased in 1812, served both Newton and Needham (now Wellesley). The first fire ward, Solomon Curtis, was appointed in 1818. The Newton Fire Department officially organized in 1843, following a petition to the state legislature sent by the residents of Newton Upper Falls. In 1903, the Fire Chief's car, purchased from the Newton-based Stanley Motor Car Company, was put into service as the nation's first motorized fire apparatus.

Prior to construction of this building, the Fire Department Headquarters was located next door in the No. 3 Engine House at 31 Willow Street; this building was since replaced in 1955. The Fire Department took a few years to move into the new building; the fire alarm system in the building went into complete operation in July of 1931.

The state of the art fire alarm office occupied the rear (east) half of the second floor. Alarms, box circuits and switchboards connected the alarm signal stations throughout the City of Newton to the village fire stations; they also communicated with the surrounding cities and towns of Boston, Brookline, Needham, Wellesley, Waltham and Watertown. By 1984 the equipment had become obsolete. It was replaced with solid state equipment that took up far less room; the fire alarm office was reconfigured to allow for much needed staff office space.

Kendall, Taylor & Company was a Boston architectural firm known primarily for its work in the field of hospital design. The firm was responsible for the design of numerous hospital institutions in New England including several buildings on the campus of the Newton City Hospital in the early 1900s and the Alms House on Winchester Street, Newton. It was founded in 1907 by Newton Centre residents Henry H. Kendall, FAIA and Bertrand Eugene Taylor, AAIA, when their earlier partnership with Edward E. Stevens dissolved. The firm, now located in Billerica, MA, is still in business today. Taylor was a charter member of the Boston Architectural Club.

Level of Significance

A well designed building of high-quality materials with a high degree of integrity. Meets the criteria for individual listing on the National Register under category C as one of Newton's finest examples of a twentieth century Classical revival style municipal building.

References

- Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Form B NWT.2888—1164 Centre Street" (1997, 1987, 1978).
Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn Withey. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*. Los Angeles: New Age Publishers, 1956. Reprint, Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1996.
Newcomb, Kenneth W. "The Makers of the Mold."
http://www.hemlockgorge.org/FHG_Makers_of_the_Mold/MakersFireAndPolice.htm (visited 12/5/11)
Text framed, second floor of Fire Department Headquarters. (Image 111221-CT-075.jpg. How to cite? -ct)

Clark, Lawrence. "America's First Piece of Motorized Fire Apparatus." Text framed, second floor of Fire Department Headquarters (Image 111221-CT-069.jpg. How to cite? -ct)

PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance: Historic Images
Additional Information Sources for Future Research

Historic Images



Figure 1: the second floor stair hall (Credit: Fire Department Headquarters)



Figure 2: fire alarm equipment, second floor. Note the pair of doors with operable transom and the multi-paned windows. (Credit: Fire Department Headquarters)

Part 2 – Description of Historically Significant Features

Exterior Visual Character

Setting

- Facing west towards Centre Street, set back from the road. Property is mostly lawn, with trees at perimeter. Separated from Fire Station #3, facing Willow Street, by a parking lot in the rear.

Shape

- Rectangular two-story structure. Symmetrical with a slightly projecting center bay.

Roof and Related Features

- Flat roof hidden behind brick parapet with a cast stone coping.

Openings

- Windows are typically set in pairs within large rectangular openings with brick flat arches and cast stone sills. The original multi-pane windows have been replaced with aluminum frames and double hung sashes with fixed spandrel transoms.
 - A large first floor window has been filled in.
 - There are mismatched louvers in lieu of some sash and spandrels.
 - There are air conditioning units in some windows.
 - A secondary egress door and exterior fire escape have been insensitively placed through the large window opening at the east elevation.
- The window over the main entrance is in an arched opening.
- The main entrance retains the original bronze doors with ornamental transom panel.
- There is a non-original door with louvers as a transom at the north elevation side entry.

Projections:

- A chimney and fire escape are present at the east (rear) elevation.

Trim and Secondary Features:

- At the center bay two fluted cast stone pilasters with Doric capitals support a cast stone frieze that reads “CITY OF NEWTON” in bronze lettering. The parapet of the center bay has a center cast stone panel with “1928” in bronze lettering and engaged balusters and piers at either side.
- The main entrance and window above are contained within a cast stone surround, with “FIRE DEPARTMENT HEADQUARTERS” in bronze lettering above the entrance.
- Cast stone panels set into the wall above the second floor windows at the front half of the building visually balance the taller windows at the fire alarm room in the rear.
- A projecting cast stone cornice runs along the full perimeter of the building.

Materials

- Brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern with cast stone cornice, sills, and water table.

Craft Details

- Carefully detailed brickwork, including quoins at corners and flat arches at the windows.
- Ornamental cast stone panels are set in the parapet at the north and south elevations.
- The top center window of east (rear) elevation has a cast stone keystone.
- A copper light sconce is centered above the side door, north elevation.
- A pair of free-standing light standards illuminate the main entrance.

Interior Visual Character

Individually Important Spaces

Second Floor Stair Hall

- With the exception of the paint on the walls and the finish on the railings, most original features appear to be intact.
- The floor is terrazzo with an integral base.
- The walls are textured to mimic travertine blocks. They are currently painted but the texture shows through.
- Three openings high up on the west wall have thin sills and decoratively shaped top corners. Metal railings with vertical balusters and spare ornamentation span all three openings.
- A guard rail of painted metal vertical balusters and polished brass handrail protects the opening to the monumental stair.
- The other doors have 4 glass lights. All appear to be original.
- The six-sided glass ceiling-mounted light fixture centered over the monumental stairs appears to be original.

Second Floor Fire Alarm Room

- The large space in the rear of the second floor was the location of the many large pieces of equipment; the room was subdivided into separate office spaces in the 1980s, when equipment became smaller.
- The original ceiling is obscured by dropped acoustical tile ceilings.
- The original flooring covered with vinyl tile flooring
- The wall surfaces appear to have matched the textured pattern of the second floor stair hall.
- The original pair of 8-light doors with an operable 14-pane wire glass transom is intact.

First Floor Stair Hall

- The floor is terrazzo with an integral base.
- The ceiling is painted plaster.
- The walls are textured to mimic travertine blocks. They are currently painted but the texture shows through.
- A monumental stair to second floor is prominently centered in the space. It is a metal pan stair with terrazzo treads. The handrail and finials at the newels are polished brass; the remainder of the metal is painted black. Historic photos indicate it may not have always been painted.
- A historic fire sleigh is on display next to the stair.

Related Spaces

Other Significant Interior Features

Part 2 – Images



Figure 3: second floor stair hall. Compare with the historic photo in figure 1.



Figure 4: typical window with cast stone panel above. Note the brick quoins at the corner and the small cast stone panel within the parapet.



Figure 5: first floor stair hall.



Figure 6: main entrance at west elevation.

Part 3 – Treatment Recommendations

Preservation Treatment Level

The Fire Department Headquarters is significant to the civic history of Newton. While some spaces have been altered in response to changes in fire response technology, the building's primary use has remained the same and many of the most significant features remain intact and in good condition. It is recommended that the most important spaces and the historically significant features (listed in Part 2 of this report) be treated at the "Preservation" Level 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 historic fabric through conservation, maintenance and repair.

In related spaces and ancillary spaces not directly contributing to the historic character, the "Rehabilitation" level of treatment from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* 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)

- Roof was not accessible for survey, although no indications of damage were visible. Survey roof condition and repair as necessary.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Repaint all wood elements, including the wood flagpole at the front entry.
- Remove ivy growth at the north and west elevations.
- Repair broken cast stone and flashing lifted from cornice at the southeast corner.
- Survey the condition of all steel lintels and sealant. Some lintels appear to be rusting, and rust jacking is starting at the north elevation. Replace lintels as required. Reset and repoint displaced bricks where rust jacking has occurred and where removed to replace lintels. Repaint all lintels, and replace the sealant.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Replace "H" missing from "Fire Department Headquarters" sign above front door
- Replace missing door stops at front door
- Clean the building exterior, including:
 - copper staining: typical at cornice flashing
 - biological growth: north elevation, especially at water table, steps and cheek walls
 - general staining: cast stone at entry, particularly above cornice and door hood.
 - rust staining: considerable below fire escape; at ferrous projections on chimney; below conduit and exterior-mounted equipment on east elevation.
- Clean the bronze front doors and hardware.
- Repoint mortar at the poor patch repairs, such as at the stack vent, north elevation.
- Repoint mortar where it had been poorly matched, such as at the first floor window infill.
- Repaint the faded red globes on the light standards at the front entry.
- Air conditioning units in windows suggest the current conditioning strategy may not be effective. Review HVAC strategy (beyond the scope of this study); remove window air conditioning units.

- Conduct thorough survey of window condition, including sash, frame, lintel and hardware. Initial exterior inspection indicates rusting lintels, but that the windows are otherwise generally in good condition. Evaluate in conjunction with daylighting, ventilation and energy efficiency strategies (beyond the scope of this survey), to prioritize timing of replacement. At the time of next replacement, replace with operable windows matching in appearance to the original windows.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- The other character-defining features are in generally good condition. Continue regular maintenance.

-louvers in lieu of some sash/ spandrels- don't even match the aluminum window frames
-insensitive placement of secondary egress door and fire escape at east elevation

Interior Recommendations

Critical/Urgent (Timeframe: As soon as possible)

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- The other character-defining features are in generally good condition. Continue regular maintenance.