

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

**Building Analysis**

**Franklin Elementary School**



Address: 125 Derby Street  
Year of Construction: 1938

Level of Significance: Moderate

Recommended Treatment Level: Rehabilitation

## **PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance**

### *Building History*

Franklin Elementary School, built in 1938, 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 1921 and 1939 to meet this increased need.

Most of the Newton schools constructed during this time period were either Colonial Revival or Tudor Revival. Like the other Colonial Revival schools, Franklin is characterized by a two-story, rectangular plan, high basement and slate hip roof. It has a pedimented central focus and a cupola.

The construction of Franklin Elementary School was funded by the Public Works Administration (PWA), a New Deal program designed to provide employment, stabilize purchasing power, improve public welfare and contribute to reviving American industry. It was created by the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933 and was terminated in 1941, by which time it had become irrelevant. The PWA funded the construction of more than 34,000 projects, including 70% of the new schools and 1/3 of the hospitals built during this time period.

The architect, Albert M. Kreider was a graduate of the Boston Architectural Center. He worked for many well-respected firms, including Brainerd & Leeds, and Cram & Ferguson, before establishing his own practice in Newtonville in 1935. Kreider also designed the Post Office in Newton Upper Falls.

After a restriction on construction during World War II, and material shortages shortly thereafter, municipal projects were renewed. An addition, designed by Budapest native Adalbert Bela Sziklas, was built on the Franklin School at this time. Sziklas (1898-1989) served in the Austrian-Hungarian Army during WWI and earned his masters in architectural engineering in 1923 from the Royal Technical College in Berlin. He emigrated to the US and resided in West Newton. From 1946-47 he formed a partnership with Walter Greymont. In addition to his work on Franklin Elementary in the early 1950s, Sziklas later designed many schools, hospitals, synagogues, churches and banks. In 1958, he won a bet with a skeptical building committee for keeping the construction of a Brookfield, MA school in Brookfield, MA within a very tight budget.

### *Level of Significance*

The building is over 70 years old and retains most of its original design features and materials. The two additions are of lesser significance, but do not detract from the original structure.

### *References*

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"A. Bela Sziklas, 91 Retired Architectural Engineer." *The Boston Globe*, Boston, MA. September 11, 1989.

Phase II: Analysis of Historically Significant City Buildings, Newton, Massachusetts  
Franklin Elementary School  
DRAFT 3/9/2012

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

*Historic Images*

## **Part 2 – Description of Historically Significant Features**

### **Exterior Visual Character**

#### *Setting*

- Set on a sloped lot in a residential neighborhood, facing south towards Derby Street. Surrounded by a playground to the east, a parking lot to the north, and large ballfields to the west. Steps and a newer ramp lead up from the sidewalk to the front entrance.

#### *Shape*

- Two and a half story rectangular structure with east and west rear wings connecting to an original auditorium wing and a later gymnasium wing. A single story addition projects from front and a narrow hallway connects a later, non-rectilinear addition to the east side.

#### *Roof and Related Features*

- Hipped and gabled roofs are clad with slate shingles, with snowguards near eaves, copper gutters, and aluminum downspouts. The additions have flat roofs. The central cupola is clad with lead coated copper.

#### *Openings*

- Regularly-spaced single window openings with limestone sills and brick flat arches with limestone keystones have been infilled with inappropriate aluminum windows. The basement windows have screens.
- A circular window in a limestone surround with carved ornamentation is set within the front pediment.
- The gymnasium wing has large expanses of glass block at the south and north walls.
- Original doors have been replaced with metal doors.
- Replacement double doors at the auditorium wing are set in a wooden architrave within a round, brick-arched opening with a limestone keystone.

#### *Projections:*

- Limestone entrance portico at front elevation, with four brick pilasters with limestone capitals.

#### *Trim and Secondary Features:*

- The broken pediment door surround at the front entry is complete with ornamental carving, paneled wood on interior faces, and “FRANKLIN SCHOOL” engraved in a plaque.
- There is painted wood trim at the eaves and gables.

#### *Materials*

- Running bond brick with Flemish bond every 8<sup>th</sup> course over a concrete foundation, with limestone window sills and cornice.
- The rear addition is brick; the other addition is stucco.
- Most entryways have granite stairs with ferrous handrails.
- There is sheet metal flashing/coping at the top of the front projection/addition.

#### *Craft Details*

- Decorative wrought iron grilles cover the narrow windows flanking the front entry; there are decorative ferrous ventilation grilles in various locations.
- The water table is formed of shaped brick; bricks are laid in the shape of quoins at the building corners.

## **Interior Visual Character**

### *Individually Important Spaces*

#### Corridors:

- The walls are finished with stack bonded, large, glazed rectangular yellow/buff ceramic tile to approximately 7' high. A black base tile meets the floors. A border tile lines the top edge and wraps around classroom doorframes. The walls are painted plaster above the tiles.
- The tiled walls have integral recesses for water fountains, radiators, and wood display cases with wood framed glass doors.
- A dropped, acoustical tile ceiling obscures the original ceiling. (floor 1)
- The floors are covered with vinyl or linoleum tile floor.

#### Stair Halls:

- The stair halls are separated from the corridors with metal-framed glazed walls, consisting of a pair of doors with 6 lights each, two 6-pane sidelights and a tall, multi-pane transom. This is typical for the Newton schools of this time period.
- The ceilings are plaster; the wall tiles with border tile continue through the stair halls.
- The painted concrete stairs have metal balusters and wood handrails.

#### Classrooms:

- Each classroom typically has a shallow coat closet with set of four pivot doors with hardware for synchronized movement. At least one set of doors is extant; the hardware for others is extant.
- Each classroom typically has built-in cabinetry next to the pivot doors, consisting of wood framed glass doors at shelves above and drawers below.
- The ceilings are dropped acoustical tile on the first floor, plaster on second floor.
- The ceiling fans and linear fluorescent fixtures are not original.
- The vinyl tile floors are not original.

#### Cafeteria/auditorium:

- A non-original dropped acoustical tile ceiling with integral fluorescent fixtures obscures the original ceiling.
- The corridor wall tiles with border tile continue in this room; above the border tile is a different ceramic tile in a running bond pattern.
- The wood stage with paneled wood wainscot and proscenium are intact; the top of the proscenium is obscured by the dropped ceiling.

### *Related Spaces*

#### Entry Vestibule:

- The plaster ceiling has trim at the full perimeter.
- The walls are finished full height with the same ceramic tiles as the corridors. There is an integral radiator recess.
- The floor and steps are terrazzo.
- The vestibule doorway has a 5-light transom; there are no door leafs.

### *Other Significant Interior Features*

- A fireplace adjoining the front projection classroom has a decorative tile face within a wood surround with a shallow mantle. Its floor is herringbone brick, with running bond back walls and a quarry tile hearth.
- The front projection classroom has a built-in, wrap-around wood bench.
- At the second floor, some rooms have built-in wood shelves with cupboards below and a sloped top for display.

## Part 2 – Images



Figure 1: front entry characterized by the door surround, flagpole, and decorative circular window centered within the pediment.



Figure 2: the bowed, single-story front projection with wood detailing is distinctive to this school



Figure 3: decorative fireplace on the first floor is characterized by the animal print ceramic tiles on the surround.



Figure 4: original set of pivot doors at a wide, shallow coat closet, typical in each classroom. The doors have been removed from many classrooms, but in many cases the hardware remains.

### **Part 3 – Treatment Recommendations**

#### **Preservation Treatment Level**

Franklin Elementary School is still in use as part of the Newton school system, and as an active school has ever changing programming needs. To enable the school to continue to serve its primary educational function 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 allows for the building to be altered or added to through the construction of additions to support new uses while preserving those portions or features which convey the building's historic character.

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)

- Connect all leaders from gutter at top to leader boot at bottom. Replace missing elements, bent gutters and leaders and broken cast iron leader shoe.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Investigate step cracking at southwest corner of front projection to confirm no structural concerns.
- Roof and cupola were not accessible for survey. From ground, slate roof appears to be in generally good condition. Inspect the roof and repair as required. Replace in kind any broken slates, particularly at cupola and snow guards. Repaint cupola.
- Repaint all wood elements, including trim at roof edge, doorways and front projection.
- Efflorescence is present below some vertical mullions of aluminum windows. This is typical at all Newton schools with aluminum replacement windows, and appears indicative of water infiltration. Inspect all windows, including sealant joints, and repair as necessary.
- Clean and repaint all ferrous elements, including ornamental grilles, guard rails, handrails.
- Repaint rusting metal grate over glass blocks, or replace with stainless steel.
- Repair where possible or replace in kind missing, bent and severely rusted handrail, guard rail and pipe rail elements. Provide new detail at railing post bases to prevent rust jacking damage. Includes railings at all exterior entries.
- Survey condition of all steel lintels. Replace severely rusted lintels. Reset and repoint displaced bricks to match existing adjacent brickwork where rust jacking has occurred and where removed to replace lintels. Repaint all lintels.
- many rusting decorative grille openings, causing rust jacking, broken brick and mortar bed joint.
  - Provide Dutchman repairs to granite steps, particularly where broken due to rust jacking at balusters and at poor previous patches. Repoint. Remove ferrous guards at granite steps.
  - Investigate source of water and rust damage at spalling and cracked concrete, particularly where rebar is exposed. Includes at foundation; exterior stairs, ramps and retaining walls; louver openings; and low north elevation. Repair or replace damaged concrete, including with patch repairs. Replace broken and missing metal nosings with non-ferrous or stainless steel nosings.
  - Replace concrete chimney coping in kind; worn away, cracks, exposed aggregate.
  - Replace broken, missing and mismatched glass blocks to match adjacent. Clean all.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Clean building exterior, including:
  - General, atmospheric staining: pronounced at front entry surround, chimney

- Rust staining: under ferrous elements, including ornamental grilles, handrails, non-original light fixtures, protective grates. At brick, granite and concrete surfaces. Pronounced at auditorium wing west elevation;
- Biological staining: north and west elevations
- Ivy growth: including southeast corner
- Efflorescence: scattered. Severe at northwest corner of gymnasium wing, at low north addition.
- Graffiti
- Water stains at granite stairs
- Conduct thorough survey of window condition, including sash, frame, lintel and hardware. Initial exterior inspection indicates there may be some water infiltration into the vertical mullions, but 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.
- Non-original grilles below some windows. Confirm their necessity. Coordinate with HVAC strategy (beyond the scope of this survey) and replacement of windows with operable windows to match original. If grilles are no longer necessary tooth in brick infill to match existing adjacent brickwork.
- Replace broken, missing, and poorly matched bricks. Locations include building corners, rust-jacked steel lintels, concrete patches at former handrail locations, and water table at connection to east addition.
- Repoint missing mortar to match original; particularly necessary at the west elevation.
- Review locations and necessity of exposed conduit in various locations.
- Replace rusting, non-contributing exterior light fixture with non-ferrous fixture or repaint.
- Repair or replace bent louver fins.

#### Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Monitor spalled limestone at base of front door surround. Use non-salt deicer to prevent further damage.
- Maintain all gutters, leaders and drains to keep clog-free.
- West elevation basement stair is protected by non-contributing but non-obtrusive corrugated metal roof. Maintain good condition.
- Continue regular maintenance of character-defining features.

### **Interior Recommendations**

#### Critical/Urgent (Timeframe: As soon as possible)

#### First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Inspect red and black floor tiles at first and second floors to confirm not vinyl asbestos. Abate or encapsulate if they are.

#### Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Restore the visibility of the door transoms between classrooms and corridors.
- Remove plywood and restore arched transom at east auditorium window.
- Investigate further to determine necessity and value of dropped ceiling in auditorium/cafeteria. Remove if not necessary.
- At the east stair hall: repaint concrete stairs, metal balustrades and stringers. Refinish wood handrails.
- Stairs to front projection classroom are worn, some tiles at the treads are worn. Repaint risers. Replace tiles in kind as necessary.



Phase II: Analysis of Historically Significant City Buildings, Newton, Massachusetts  
Franklin Elementary School  
DRAFT 3/9/2012

- Refinish the wood stairs and stage floor; the proscenium and paneled wainscot appear to be in good condition.
- Survey the built-in cabinets in classrooms. Repair and restore as required.
- Inventory the sets of pivoting closet doors in the classrooms. Repair and restore as required extant doors and hardware to good working order.
- Clean glazed tile walls at interior wall surfaces.
- Analyze paint to determine original paint colors, especially where currently painted light blue. Restore original paint schemes at next repainting.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Continue regular maintenance of character-defining features.