

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

Building Analysis

Nonantum Library



Address: 144 Bridge Street
Year of Construction: 1957

Level of Significance: Moderate

Recommended Treatment Level: Preservation/Rehabilitation

PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance

Building History

The Nonantum Library was constructed in 1957 in to serve as a neighborhood branch library and was the last branch library to be constructed in Newton. Although built decades after the majority of Newton's citizen-subscription-funded branch libraries from the 1920s, the structure mirrors the intimate scale of its predecessors. Unlike the 1920s branch libraries, which are primarily in the Tudor Revival style, the Nonantum building was designed in a simplified version of the Classical Revival style.

The City-owned library site was originally the home of a combined fire and police station. When the fire department was relocated the old station building was demolished to allow for a new building to hold the branch library, which had previously been located in rental space on Watertown Street.

Appleton & Stearns, the firm responsible for the design of the new library building, was organized in 1919 as a successor firm to the well-known Boston firm of Peabody & Stearns. The principals of the newly renamed firm were Newton Centre resident and former Peabody & Stearns partner William Cornell Appleton and Frank Abbot Stearns, son of Peabody & Stearns founder John Goddard Stearns. Appleton was also responsible for an addition to the Newton Highlands Library (now Brigham House) and to the old main library in Newton Corner. Other noted works by Appleton include a courthouse in Newport, Rhode Island and several buildings at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

Six of Newton's branch libraries closed in 1991 when the main library came online. Nonantum was one of the remaining four branches, all of which closed on June 6, 2008 due to budget cuts. From 2009 to the present the building has been rented out to the Ciociaro Social Club to pursue its mission of promoting the Italian language and culture.

Level of Significance

While not as significant as its predecessors from the 1920s, the Nonantum Branch Library was designed to be a prominent municipal building for one of Newton's neighborhoods. The building is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with Newton's branch library system.

Bibliography

- Abele, Susan and Candace Jenkins, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory- Nomination Form. Newton 20th Century MRA Amendment", Newton, Mass. 1986-7.
- American Institute of Architects. *American Architects Directory: First Edition*. New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1955.
- Long, Chrissie. "Newton Branch Libraries to Close Friday." *Newton Tab*. June 3, 2008.
- Long, Chrissie. "Library Branches Are Roots of Their Villages." *Newton Tab*. Sept. 4, 2007.
- Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Form B NWT.3603—144 Bridge Street". 1987.
- Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Form B NWT.5830—144 Bridge Street" 1997.
- Walker, Jim. "Nonantum library now home to Italian social club." *Newton Tab*. April 10, 2010.

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

Historic Images



Figure 1: Nonantum Branch Library in the 1980s. (Credit: Historic Newton)



Figure 2: Nonantum Branch Library c. 1997. (Credit: MACRIS)

Part 2 – Description of Historically Significant Features

Exterior Visual Character

Setting

- Facing west towards Bridge Street on a corner lot with Watertown Street to the south. Parking lots to the north and east.

Shape

- Low one-story building with raised central entrance pavilion, attic, and finished basement.

Roof and Related Features

- Moderately pitched gable roof with slate shingles and copper trim. Two painted wood roundel dormers with louvers set into roof.

Openings

- Windows are typically regularly spaced 12-over-12 wood windows with brick flat arches and limestone sills. Tracks are visible for the exterior storms/screens, which were not in place at the time of the survey.
- At the low projections the windows are 4-over-4 double-hung.
- An 8-over-12 double-hung is found at the north end of the north projection; the screen is still installed.
- An octagonal window is at the north and south gable ends.
- 5-panel operable hopper windows are found near the ceiling of the basement.
- The main entrance has a wood double door and 5-pane, half-round fanlight set deeply into the portico with a decorative paneled wood surround.

Projections:

- Limestone entrance portico at center of Bridge Street elevation with decorative quoins and “Newton Free Library” carved above the doorway.
- Limestone south entry, rectilinear, simpler in form, with “Library Hall” carved above the doorway

Trim and Secondary Features:

- Dentilated wood cornice at top of entrance portico and less detailed wood cornice at the top of the brick walls.
- Copper stair handrail with ferrous balusters.

Materials

- Common bond brick (header course every 6th course) with limestone entrance portico, corners, and window sills.
- Concrete foundation, smooth finish.
- Copper gutters, roof flashing, leaders. Simple, ornamental copper ridge cap.

Craft Details

- Limestone trim around arched entry, including keystone
- Entry ceiling-mounted fixture
- Raised panels at limestone quoins at entry

Interior Visual Character

General Features

- The ceilings and walls are typically plaster. All wood features, including doors, windows and trim are stained the same light color.

Individually Important Spaces

Main Reading Room (currently main event space)

- The plaster ceiling has recessed lighting panels and ceiling fans. Exposed wood beams delineate the central space between the main doorway and the circulation desk.
- The walls are articulated with a wood cornice, a chair rail, and “panels” outlined with thin, painted wood trim. Large grilles in the interior walls are set below the chair rail.
- Commercial carpet covers the original flooring.
- The built-in wood bookshelves at all exterior walls are intact. The top shelf is directly below the interior window sills; baseboard heaters are built in below the bookshelves
- The circulation desk and cabinetry flanking the entry are paneled wood with a laminate top surface. The cabinetry has built-in radiator housing with an ornamental metal grille and display cases with glass hinged tops.
- The pair of 10-light wood doors and fanlight transom to the entry vestibule, which projects into the room, are flanked by fluted wood pilasters on a paneled wood wall.
- The wood paneled doorway behind circulation desk is flanked by fluted wood pilasters and wood paneling. The Ciociaro seal above the doorway is centered within the paneling.

Related Spaces

Main Entry Vestibule

- The floor is terrazzo with an integral baseboard and recess for walk-off mat.
- The doorways to the exterior and main reading room occupy the west and east walls respectively.
- A large ornamental metal grille is below the chair rail at each side wall.
- Two tablets, one at each side wall, honor Nonantum citizens who served in all wars, and who served the city in public and community services.

Stair Hall

- The plaster ceiling has a soffit at north end; there is a wood picture rail on the plaster walls.
- The floors are covered in vinyl tiles.
- The metal pan stairs have terrazzo treads, a wood handrail, and metal balusters in a decorative pattern.

Side Entry Vestibule

- The walls are articulated with a stained wood cornice, a chair rail, and painted wood trim outlining panels above and below the chair rail. The light fixture is recessed in the ceiling.
- The floor is terrazzo with an integral baseboard and recess for walk-off mat.
- The exterior door and the single, 15-light wood door to the Stair Hall occupy the south and north walls, respectively.
- A large ornamental metal grille is below the chair rail at one side wall.

Other Significant Interior Features

- The east main floor bathroom has been expanded. The dropped acoustic tile ceiling obscures the original plaster on metal lath ceiling, including locations where original partition walls have been removed.
- The basement rooms are finished with plaster ceilings, painted plaster or CMU walls, and carpeted floors. Of the various door types, most are hollow wood with flush plywood veneer; one is divided horizontally, like a Dutch door. The main basement room has painted, exposed concrete ceiling beams.

Part 2 – Images



Figure 3: detail of the front entrance



Figure 4: the side entry echoes the front in materials, but is appropriately less prominent in detailing.



Figure 5: the stairs are carefully designed as an understated yet important design element.



Figure 6: the main reading room retains its character while functioning well as a general purpose gathering space.

Part 3 – Treatment Recommendations

Preservation Treatment Level

As the last branch library to be built in Newton, the Nonantum Library represents the culmination of a decades long movement and is thus significant to the civic history of Newton. While the building's use has changed, it is in good condition, with the majority of its original materials and design features intact. It is recommended that the exterior and the most significant spaces and historically significant features 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)

- Gutter failure at the northwest corner has led to a loss of eave, cornice, and dentils. Similar damage is in locations to the north and south of the entry portico. Replace battered and missing portions of leaders. Repair damage and replace missing fabric in kind.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Galvanic reaction between the copper handrail and the ferrous balusters below has severely eroded the base of the balusters. Replicate the railing, reusing the copper handrail if possible, using compatible metals.
- Repair, resecure, or replace deteriorated wood elements as necessary. Includes dormers and side vestibule fascia. Paint all wood elements, including windows.
- Slate roof in poor condition, with many broken and missing slates. Reroof in kind. Turn over and reuse slates in good condition where possible. Rehang or replace loose slate siding at rear projections.
 - Reset or replace loose pieces of ridge cap.
 - Remove rust and repaint all ferrous elements, including pipe rails and handrails.
 - Repoint missing mortar at the chimney; mortar is typically otherwise in good condition.
 - Repair the severe cracks and missing chunks at stairs and ramp; most damage appears to be a result of rust jacking from unpainted, rusting pipe rail.
 - Repair the spalling concrete foundation at the northwest and northeast corners.
 - Reset and repoint the granite front stairs. Provide Dutchman repairs where broken, primarily at rusting handrail posts.
 - The granite landings and thresholds at the front and side entries have severely eroded. Refinish and reset at the proper height.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Replace two mismatched window panes in the basement exterior door. Clean the sloppy paint edges off the panes.
- Clean and refinish the water damaged front doors, where the finish has been worn away.
- Clean the building exterior, including:

- General atmospheric staining: including the limestone of the south entry projection; at north of west wall
- Biological growth: at north of west wall
- Rust staining: below ferrous elements, including handrails.
- Efflorescence: at sill of 8-over-12 window
- Sealant: at edges and top of 8-over-12 window
- Graffiti: at limestone quoins (minor)

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Monitor the spalling limestone at the front entry for further spalling. Use non-salt deicer to prevent further damage.
- Continue regular maintenance of character-defining features.
- Maintain all gutters, leaders and drains to keep clog-free.
- Maintain the condition and operability of windows, which are generally in very good condition, including the intact chains.
- The basement stairs are covered and generally in good condition. Retain the non-original, non-obtrusive awning roof, or another of similar function.

Interior Recommendations

Critical/Urgent (Timeframe: As soon as possible)

- Locate and remedy sources of water damage. Includes:
 - peeling plaster:
 - dropped ceiling, north end of stair hall
 - wall at southwest corner of stair hall.
 - peeling paint:
 - plaster ceiling, south bathroom, main floor
 - plaster ceiling and wall, east bathroom, basement near east window
 - plaster ceiling and wall, south bathroom, basement
 - CMU exterior walls, main basement room
 - deteriorated plywood wall veneer: at basement ancillary room
- Confirm the source of water damage in the basement electrical closet has been repaired. Replace damaged equipment, conduit, and other appurtenances.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Repair water damaged finishes listed above after repairing source of water. Includes patching and repairing plaster, replacing plywood wall veneer, and repainting.
- Original floor tiles in many spaces may be vinyl asbestos tiles. Some are covered, many are in good condition. Some are worn, including in stair hall. Test floor tiles and pipe insulation for asbestos. If positive, abate or encapsulate.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Clean the metal grille and sand and refinish wood in the radiator case next to the main doors where stained. Staining appears to be from overheating.
- Replace in kind broken hardware at the glass display cases.
- Repair the general cracking in plaster ceilings, including: the main reading room, main basement room, and ancillary basement rooms.
- Repaint stair balustrade and risers.
- Investigate what was originally in the round space in the paneling above the circulation desk currently occupied by the Ciociaro seal.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Continue regular maintenance of character-defining features.