

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

Building Analysis

Waban Library



Address: 1608 Beacon Street
Year of Construction: 1929

Level of Significance: High
Individually listed building on the National Register of Historic Places, 1990.

Recommended Treatment Level: Preservation

PART I - Analysis of Historical Significance

Building History

The Waban Library, constructed in 1929, is the fourth of five branch libraries built in Newton by citizen subscription between 1926 and 1939. Like the earlier libraries constructed in West Newton (1926), Auburndale (1927) and Newton Centre (1927), building is a small-scale, one and a half story brick library in the Tudor Revival style. The building was designed by the Boston firm Densmore, LeClear and Robbins.

Prior to construction of the branch library Waban's book collection was housed in multiple locations around the village, including at the post office, the local pharmacy and in the basement of the Angier School. The Waban Public Library Association was founded in 1928; it succeeded in raising \$63,500 in funds from over 550 Waban families, merchants and organizations to construct the library. The Waban Improvement Society and the Waban Woman's Club were important contributors. Following its completion, the Waban Library was given to the City of Newton on May 2, 1930.

The office of Densmore, LeClear & Robbins was a prominent local firm with many buildings in Boston and Cambridge to their name. Some of their more notable projects include the Paine Furniture Building (1914), the Salada Tea Company office building (1927), and the Back Bay Telephone Exchange in Boston (1930) as well as the Oak Hill School (1936) and First Church of Christ, Scientist (1940) in Newton. Gifford LeClear, architect, engineer and one of the principals of the firm, was a resident of Waban. He earned his Bachelors and Masters degrees in engineering at Harvard, in 1895 and 1896 respectively. In 1897 he and Edward Dana Densmore opened an office in Boston together. In 1914, architect and Newton Highlands resident Henry Chandler Robbins, their employee in charge of architectural drafting since 1907, became a partner and the firm name changed to Densmore, LeClear & Robbins. LeClear was a member of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers and lectured at Harvard's Architectural School and Graduate School of Business Administration.

The Waban Library remained a branch library in Newton's library system even after the closure of the majority of Newton's branch libraries in 1991 when the new central library building was completed. The branch was closed on June 6, 2008. In 2009 the building was reopened with private funding as the Waban Library Center.

Level of Significance

The Waban Library was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 under Criteria A and C. It is significant for its association with the development of Newton's branch library system and as an institutional example of the Tudor Revival style by a well-known architectural firm of the early 1900s.

References

- Harvard Alumni Association. "Biographical Sketch: Gifford LeClear." *Harvard College Class of 1895 – Fifth Report*. Cambridge, MA: Crimson Printing Company (June 1915) p.178-179.
- Harvard Alumni Association. "Biographical Sketch: Henry Chandler Robbins." *Harvard College Class of 1901 – Fourth Report*. Cambridge, MA: Crimson Printing Company (July 1916) p. 350.
- Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Form B NVT.3848—1608 Beacon Street" (1997, 1988, 1978).
- Waban Library Center. "Waban Library Center – Rich History, Promising Future."
<<http://www.wabanlibrarycenter.org/about-2/test-programs/>> (visited 17 November, 2011).

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

Historic Images



Figure 1: Waban Library, c.1930. (Credit: Digital Newton).



Figure 2: Interior view of reading room and circulation desk. Note arched ceilings and ornamental plaster cove molding. (Credit: Digital Newton, Newton Free Public Library).



Figure 3: Interior view of reading room and circulation desk. Note the tables, chairs, chandeliers, vaulted ceiling and wooden arch beams. (Credit: Digital Newton, Newton Free Public Library).

Part 2 – Description of Historically Significant Features

Exterior Visual Character

Setting

- Faces west towards the intersection of Beacon Street and Woodward Street. The landscaping has become overgrown and now obscures much of the building.

Shape

- One and one-half stories, roughly cross-shaped in plan. The main entrance is in a small projection at the south side of the street-facing gable.

Roof and Related Features

- Gable roof with cross gables and sloped parapets at the gable end walls. It is clad in slate with copper flashings, ridge cap, and through-wall flashing at the parapet coping. The flat roof at the entrance projection is hidden behind a crenellated parapet with cast stone copings. There is a large masonry chimney at the rear of the building. A copper cupola with a ferrous weathervane projects from the center of the roof.
- A copper leader runs through the entry portico in an unusual and inefficient configuration.

Openings

- Windows are typically steel sashes with lead comes set in wood frames. Casement windows have ornate custom handles on interior.
- The majority of the windows consist of large openings set within a cast stone quoin surround with wood mullions that separate two 9-pane fixed upper sashes from two 18-pane casements.
- At the gable ends, stone mullions separate 9 sashes, stacked in three rows of three sashes each. The bottom sash of each stack is an operable casement.
- The street-facing gable end has two smaller rectangular openings with individual sashes and a group of three openings higher up.
- Basement windows (behind concrete areas with removable steel grates at south half of building) are typically steel sash and frame, in configurations of fixed and hopper sashes; many have been replaced with aluminum double-hung windows.
- The main door is wood, 8-panel with Tudor arch set within a wood frame in a quoined cast stone masonry opening

Projections:

- Cast stone entry portico with two sets of stairs leading to landing, one of which has been turned into an accessible ramp.
- The entry on north side of rear gable is half-timbered with decorative wood brackets resting on cast stone blocks. Flat metal caps are installed on the ends of the projecting wood beams.
- The concrete stairs to basement door are covered and protected by an unobtrusive non-original roof of asphalt shingles over plywood.

Trim and Secondary Features:

- Cast stone quoins at corners and window surrounds. Cast stone foundation, water table, and parapet coping. The end copings at the street-facing gable end support small stone urns. There are cast stone window hoods at the north gable.
- Cast iron pipe railings

Materials

- Flemish bond brick with cast stone trim. Slate roof with copper. Wood trim at eaves and gables.
- The rear gable has a half-timber pediment, with vertical wood members and stucco, over brick modillions.

Craft Details

- “WL” cast into keystone of each arch at entry
- Book ornament in cast stone window hood
- Ornamental brickwork at chimney
- Cast stone modillion blocks at the bottom of gable end eaves

Interior Visual Character

General (in significant spaces, unless otherwise noted)

- Painted plaster ceilings.
- Painted, textured stucco at walls.
- Commercial carpeting, presumably covering the original wood floors; further investigation needed to confirm.
- Wood baseboard.
- Radiators below windows housed in wood with grilles on the top and front.

Individually Important Spaces

Center Hall/ Circulation Desk Area

- Barrel-vaulted space.
- Wood bowed trusses with ornamental brackets.
- Paneled wood and leaded glass screen wall behind circulation desk, consisting of a Tudor arch doorway flanked by two window panels on either side, each with 24 panes.
- Wood-paneled partition wall separating entry vestibule and reference room from center hall. Elaborate botanical carvings at the cornice and at the two Tudor arched doorways.
- Original wood circulation desk.
- Original chandeliers intact; supplemented by linear fluorescent lights added to the bottoms of the truss chords.

Reading Rooms

- Shallow barrel-vaulted spaces, with similar detailing. The north room houses the children's collection.
- Intact ornamental cast plaster band at cornice, in good condition.
- Decorative trim detail at edges of soffits between the center hall and the reading rooms.
- Built-in wood bookshelves; additional shelves have been added to accommodate the growth of the book collection.
- The original chandeliers have been replaced by ceiling-mounted linear fluorescent fixtures.
- Many of the original round tables (north wing) and rectangular tables (south wing) and wood chairs are still in use, although some tables are in disrepair.

Related Spaces

Entry Vestibule

- Cross-groin ceiling.
- Terrazzo floor in a checkerboard pattern, terrazzo baseboard, marble threshold.
- Two plaques; one commemorating Waban members of the Armed Forces, and one dedicating the library to the city.
- Wood paneled door to center hall.

Reference Room

- Flat plaster ceiling and walls.

Other Significant Interior Features

- Limestone fireplace to the north of the circulation desk.
 - Tudor arched opening.
 - Limestone-colored brick back.

Part 2 – Images



Figure 4: Cupola, entry pavilion, typical window.



Figure 5: Rear gable- half-timbered detail at top with brick dentils, typical gable-end window.



Figure 6: central circulation area is intact, including the desk, screen wall, and decorative woodwork at the barrel-vaulted ceiling



Figure 7: wood paneled door from center hall to the entry vestibule. Lead-camed lights at three panels, arched doorway in wood paneled screen wall with elaborate carvings.

Part 3 – Treatment Recommendations

Preservation Treatment Level

The Waban Library is a significant building within the City of Newton, and continues to serve its original function as a local library. Overall it is in very good condition and retains the majority of its original design features and materials. It is recommended that any work on the exterior and in the significant spaces on the interior be performed according to the “Preservation” level of treatment, as 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.

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)

- The flat roof above the entry pavilion was not accessible to survey. The one copper leader emptying this roof is visibly clogged, possibly due to a convoluted run through entry portico and a bottom run which is too shallow and bent. Ponding water on this roof may be directly related to the severe water damage and efflorescence in the cast stone below. Survey roof condition and repair as necessary. Unclog and repair this and all other gutters and leaders, and replace bottom segment of this leader.
- The cast stone modillion block at the southwest corner is missing. Surrounding bricks are pushing out of the wall plane. Rebuild this corner. Repair and reconnect disconnected leader.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

- Roof slates are generally in good condition, some broken at bottom courses and at the rear entry roof. Replace broken and damaged slates. Coordinate with all necessary flashing repair.
- Conduct a thorough survey of window conditions, including sash, frame and hardware. The original windows should be retained to the largest extent possible, repaired and made weathertight. The steel window sash, wood frames and lead caming are generally in good condition. A few windows, in particular the rear gable window, need repair and repainting. Replace missing comes and broken/discolored panes of glass as necessary.
 - Some basement windows now have vents in place of panes. Restore to clear glass.
- Repair and secure segments of the roof ridge cap where it is lifting up.
- Severe efflorescence and spalling were noted at the cast stone entry portico, along with evidence of multiple generations of failed patches. Identify the source of moisture infiltration in this area (see Critical/Urgent list). Repair and clean cast stone, including cast stone dutchmen as required.
- Repair all wood elements as necessary. Repaint. Includes replacement eave at east side of south wing.
- There are typically cracks at the bricks surrounding cast stone modillion blocks. Investigate the cause and repair.
- A large crack from the east corner of the north gable to the window hood has been patched. The west corner of this elevation exhibits severe efflorescence. Investigate further, including the condition of the coping and step flashing at the parapet, to determine the cause. Repair the source of water infiltration. Clean efflorescence.

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Remove rust and repaint all ferrous elements, including windows and handrails.
- Determine source of staining at cupola. Repair as necessary and clean.
- Clean the building exterior (general). Includes: ivy removal, biological growth, rust staining and general staining.

- The light fixture in the entry portico is not original; there is evidence of a square plate at ceiling. Consider replacing.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

- Maintain all gutters, leaders and drains to keep clog-free.
- Continue regular maintenance of character-defining features. Elements that become deteriorated should be repaired or replaced in kind.

Interior Recommendations

Critical/Urgent (Timeframe: As soon as possible)

- An area of water damaged plaster was noted at the northeast corner of the Reference Room. It should be determined if this is an of active water infiltration. Once the source of the moisture infiltration is identified and corrected the ceilings should be carefully patched, retaining the largest amount of historic material possible.

First Priority (Timeframe: 1-3 years)

Second Priority (Timeframe: 3-5 years)

- Repair broken wood dentil on bottom chord of one of the decorative trusses in center hall.
- Clean minor staining from the interior side of the stone mullions at the gable ends.

Maintenance (Timeframe: Ongoing)

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