

FORM B - BUILDING

NRDIS 8/2/84

Assessor's number
1-6USGS Quad
NewburyportArea(s)
L,UForm Number
365

Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Town Newburyport

Place (neighborhood or village)

Address 94 State Street

Historic Name Nathaniel Tracy House/City Library
(Newburyport Public Library)

Uses: Present Library

Original Residence

Date of Construction 1771

Source Currier, History of Newburyport

Style/Form Georgian (modified)

Architect/Builder original - unknown; 1864 - Arthur
Gilman; 1882 addition - Rufus Sargent

Exterior Material:

Foundation Granite

Wall/Trim Brick

Roof Slate

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures

none

Major Alterations (with dates) 1864-5 - renovated for use
as library; 1870 - reading room; 1882 - Simpson Annex
constructed, mastic removed, new brick face

Condition good

Moved ☒ no ☐ yes Date

Acreage 15860 SF

Setting adjacent to the central business district and in
close proximity to Georgian and Federal houses



Recorded by Lisa Mausolf

Organization Newburyport Historical Commission

Date (month/year) May 1999

Follow Massachusetts Historical Commission Survey Manual instructions for completing this form.

BUILDING FORM (94 State Street)

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of the building in terms of other buildings within the community.

This three-story, brick building was originally constructed in 1771 as a private dwelling. It was renovated for use as a public library in 1865 and achieved its present appearance in the late 19th century. Characteristics of the Georgian style include the original 5 x 4-bay massing, the symmetry, the double-hipped roof, the bold modillion cornice and the attenuated third story openings. Projecting belt courses are located between the stories. The original center entrance displayed an entablatured surround and the windows contained 6/6 sash with a 3 x 2-light unit in the attic.

The building rests on a foundation of rough granite blocks with smooth top margins and a curved water table. The building displays a smooth brick exterior, laid in a common bond. The present brick veneer dates to the 1880s when the mastic coating applied in the 1860s was removed and the rear addition was completed. The entrance porch which now consists of paired Ionic columns (a c.1865 addition) is fronted by granite steps with a wrought iron curved railing. Echoing the columns is a single pilaster on either side of the rusticated wood door surround. The entrance has been fitted with double glass and wood doors; each leaf has a 2 x 3-light over a molded panel. The first and second floor windows contain 2/2 wooden sash with molded surrounds and exterior storm windows. The windows are capped by rectangular sandstone lintels with chamfered lower edges and plain stone sills. Between the center windows on the second and third floors there is a marble panel with flared corners and raised letters reading "Public Library and Reading Room". The third floor windows contain smaller 2/2 sash.

Projecting near the center of the north and south elevations is a shallow, 2 1/2-story gable with returns. The additions are just two bays wide with longer 2/2 windows on the upper level and a semi-circular lunette in the attic. On the north side the gable is fronted by a secondary entrance porch supported by paired fluted Corinthian columns resting on paneled bases. The columns are spanned by arched members and display a wide frieze and dentil course. Each leaf of the large double-doored entrance has three raised panels. The entrance is capped by a rectangular transom and the original granite steps have been topped by a thick stone that serves as a base for the ramp. An exterior brick chimney rises to the rear of the gable. To the west of the gabled projections the building is punctuated by two stories of elongated 2/2 windows with the same lintel treatment and cornice. A large iron fire escape is mounted on the south elevation.

The building is setback from State Street by a small front lawn. Along the street there is a granite wall about 1 1/2 feet high. The wall curves at the front walk and is topped by iron pickets. A number of bushes and flowering trees dot the property. The area to the south of the library was the site of the former YMCA which burned in 1987.

Inside, the Directors' Room still retains its original Federal-style detailing, including the delicate dentilwork, egg-and-dart moldings, the mantelpiece carving and arched window recesses with keystones and scrolls. The first floor reading room also retains considerable decorative detailing. The reading room was installed in 1870 and the Simpson Annex including the vaulted upstairs reading room dates to 1880.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Describe the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.

This Georgian-style residence was constructed in 1771 by Capt. Patrick Tracy, who built the house for his son, Nathaniel Tracy. The present building stands on the site of a house erected by Greenleaf and later occupied by Rev. John Lowell, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Newburyport. The former house was moved to Temple Street by Patrick Tracy and is marked with a plaque. The Tracy estate originally extended to Green Street and included gardens, fruit orchards, barns, stables and other outbuildings.

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued):

Wealthy merchant and ardent patriot Nathaniel Tracy was one of the major financiers of the Revolution. He owned a fleet of 110 ships including many that were commissioned as privateers during the War. Tracy served as a representative to the Massachusetts State Constitutional Convention in 1779, served as a town selectman in 1780 and 1782 and was one of the founders of the St. John's Masonic Lodge. Nathaniel Tracy married the daughter of Colonel Jeremiah Lee, one of Marblehead's most prominent citizens.

After the Tracy fortune was devastated by the Revolutionary War, the property subsequently passed to Jonathan Jackson, Tracy's brother-in-law and business partner in the importing firm of Jackson, Tracy and Tracy. Jackson served as a member of the Committee of Safety, Correspondence and Inspection in 1775-7 and was elected to the General Court in 1776 & 1777. He served as a delegate to the Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1782. He also served in the Massachusetts Senate in 1789 and as a Census Commissioner in 1790. During Jackson's residence, among the famous who were entertained in the house were John Hancock and George Washington.

Between 1791 and 1796 the Tracy house was occupied by the eccentric Lord Timothy Dexter. Soon thereafter, the house was purchased by merchant James Prince who served as an early selectman and collector of the port. Due to financial difficulties Prince was forced to rent the house in 1807. The tenant, James Coburn, opened the house to travelers as the Sun Hotel and continued to operate his business here until 1810. By 1824 James Prince was again living in the Tracy House and during his tenure the General Marquis de Lafayette was escorted to the house by parade where he dined with invited guests before spending the night.

In 1863 the Tracy House was purchased for use as a public library at a cost of \$6,000, raised primarily through public subscription. Alterations to the building were completed in 1865, according to the designs of noted Boston architect, Arthur Gilman, who was a native of Newburyport. Albert Currier, former mayor of the City, served as the construction superintendent. The cost of the alterations was approximately \$10,000 and neither Gilman or Currier charged any fees. The building was deeded to the city in September 1865 and opened to the public January 1, 1866. As part of the renovations, the brick dwelling was covered with mastic, the windows were altered to contain 2/2 sash, and the original recessed entrance with pilasters and dentils had been replaced by the present entrance porch supported by Ionic columns. An iron fence was erected around the property.

In 1870 William C. Todd established a free reading room in connection with the Public Library. Todd had served as the principal of the Female High School of Newburyport. Todd recognized the free reading room, containing the leading newspapers and magazines of the day, as necessary as free schools and free libraries. In 1881, Michael H. Simpson of Boston and others contributed \$22,000 for the construction of a reading room. The Simpson Annex was completed and dedicated on April 28, 1882. The mastic covering on the exterior of the building was removed at this time and a new veneer of pressed brick was applied. The tall brick chimneys were also removed at this time. The plans for the addition were drawn by Rufus Sargent of Newburyport and the contractor was Albert Currier. The 48 x 28' reading room is 14 feet high and provided shelves for 25,000 additional volumes. The room was finished in quartered oak.

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued):

The Newburyport Public Library is one of the oldest public libraries in the state, following the examples of Wayland and New Bedford, Peabody, Boston, Concord, Southborough, Gloucester and other places. In 1851 the Massachusetts legislature passed a law enabling cities and towns to appropriate money for public libraries. Newburyport's first library of a public nature had been opened in May 1851 in a room over the Merchants' National Bank at the corner of State and Charter Streets. It was known as the Merrimack Library Association. In October 1851 the library moved to the corner of State and Pleasant Streets where it remained until 1854. In 1854 Josiah Little gave the City \$5,000 to establish a permanent library to be under the control of the Mayor and Aldermen. On September 5, 1855 the library was opened in a room on the first floor of the northwesterly side of City Hall.

The library will be embarking upon a long-awaited addition and rehabilitation project in the fall of 1999. The architects for the project are Finegold Alexander + Associates.

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