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In 1892 a committee recommended buying both the Cutting House (see page 3) and Josiah Smith Tavern to create a site for a new library. The town adopted a more conservative approach and purchased only the Cutting House. (Photo c. 1900, courtesy Weston Historical Society)

The Weston Public Library: Symbol of a Cultured Citizenry

Editor's note: The following article is excerpted from a February 2010 report prepared by the Weston Historical Commission at the request of the Board of Selectmen. The commission was asked to comment on the significance of the Old Library following the November 2009 Town Meeting vote to discontinue work on a plan to reuse the Josiah Smith Tavern as a restaurant and the Old Library as a home for the Women's Community League (upper level) and Weston History Center and Town Archives (lower level).

Why is the Old Library Significant?

The 1899 Weston Public Library is significant because of its history, architecture, and location facing the Town Green.

- It plays a vital role in framing the Town Green and serving as a gateway to the Town Center.
- Together with the Josiah Smith Tavern and First Parish Church, it forms an architectural ensemble of remarkable quality.
- It is located within the Boston Post Road Historic District, which has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1983 and is considered “the best preserved section of the state’s major 18th century east-west connector.”
- It was the town’s first library building and served the community for nearly a century.
- Along with the construction of the 1888 fieldstone First Parish Church across the street, the library marked the transition of Weston from a rural backwater to a “country town of residences of the first class.”
- The library was a source of great civic pride and symbolized a growing emphasis on education, literacy, and culture.
- The architect, Alexander S. Jenney, was well-known in Boston architectural circles. He began his career in the office of the great 19th century architect H.H. Richardson and worked with another celebrated firm, McKim, Mead, and White, on the Boston Public Library before moving to Weston and taking on this commission.
- The design is an important example of the Jacobethan style, inspired by English late medieval architecture. It has its roots in the English Arts and Crafts tradition, which emphasized the importance of good design and quality craftsmanship.
- The library is one of only a few examples in Weston of the Jacobethan style.
- The library is a rare example in Massachusetts of a public library constructed in the Jacobethan or English Revival style. Of public libraries built in Massachusetts at the turn of the century, less than 10% were in this style.
- The building is solidly constructed and remains remarkably unchanged, particularly on the exterior, retaining its handsome detailing.



The George W. Cutting House at the corner of School Street and Central Avenue (now Boston Post Road) was moved in the late 19th century after the town purchased the property as a site for a library, Charles H. Fiske Jr. arranged the move to 36 Church Street, where the house stands today. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

History

What we now call the Old Library was Weston's first library building. The library itself was established in 1857 and originally occupied one room of the 1847 Town Hall across the street. After the Civil War, the Town Hall was expanded to provide additional library space and a memorial hall. But by the late 1880s, despite one more expansion, it was clear that the library was outgrowing its quarters.

In early 1894, the town purchased the George W. Cutting house as a library site, but plans for a new library were delayed by the need for a new high school. Rev. Charles Russell, minister at First Parish Church, was an eloquent advocate for a new library building separate from the Town Hall, writing as follows:

And yet the need is imminent. Already the present accommodations are crowded . . . But whatever happens, let us hope that the library will not be tucked into the rear of a new town hall. . . At any cost make it the great centre of intellectual life, the university of our town---free, accessible, beautiful.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, prominent libraries were the sign of a cultured citizenry. Weston was growing to be a desirable town in the late 19th cen-

ture, and more and more wealthy and influential Boston businessmen and professionals were moving here. These men played a role in urging the Town to proceed despite concerns about cost. The following is one of many appeals to residents:

Finally, it seems impossible that the Town of Weston with all its culture, intelligence, and wealth, should remain longer content with the present crowded and unsatisfactory quarters for the Library. We urge that the time has come when the Town should erect a simple, dignified building that will rebound to its credit, and make the Library, as it should be, one of the leading features and most potent attractions of its civic life.

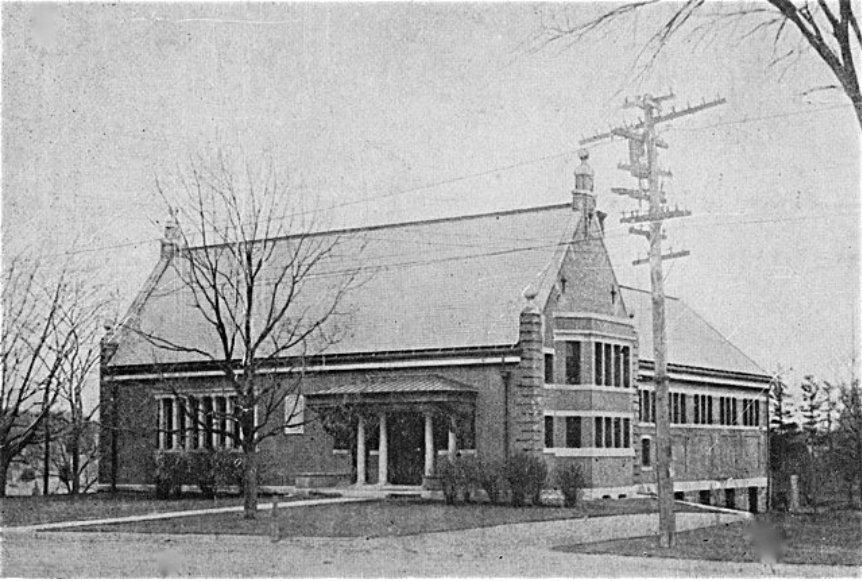
Finally, in 1899, the town voted to proceed and allocated \$40,000 for construction. The building committee hired the Boston firm of Fox, Jenney, and Gale, in part because two of the three young principals, Thomas A. Fox and Alexander S. Jenney, had been associated with Charles McKim in the construction of the Boston Public Library. Work began in November 1899 and was completed exactly one year later.

The pride of the town is evident in the ornamental stone plaque next to the door, reading “Weston Public Library, founded AD 1857, This building was built by the TOWN, 1899” The all-capital letters in the word Town emphasize the fact that all residents had contributed. A 1908 history of Middlesex County called it “a splendid monument to the culture and refinement of the citizens of Weston.”

On the first floor, the large reading room was lighted on three sides by mullioned windows and featured exposed oak beams and walls tinted green with bands of white and red. The original children’s alcove was to the right of the main entrance. Above the children’s room was a small office for the trustees. Basement space was allocated for future book storage and a fireproof storage room for town records. Weston has one of the earliest libraries to be fully electrified. The librarian could turn on and off almost all the lights from a single switch at her desk. The new library had a modern open stack system, and the Dewey decimal system was adopted to help patrons locate their own books.

The building of the library had an impact on literacy and cultural awareness. The librarian, Elizabeth S. White, noted a marked increase in circulation and increased use of books by the schools. In 1900, the library came a member of the Massachusetts Library Art Club, which circulated collections of pictures for exhibition at intervals during the year. Thus the cultural mission of the library was broadened.

The children’s alcove became so popular that in 1912 the trustees called for its enlargement. Space in the lower level became available when the town clerk moved to the new Town Hall. Encouraged by a gift of \$5,000 from library trustee Miss Louisa Case, the space was remodeled in 1922 into a children’s room named for her niece, Rosamond Freeman. A handsome Tudor porch was added to mark the entrance to the children’s area.



This photograph was taken between the time of the library opening in 1900 and the addition of the Tudor style entrance to the children's room in the early 1920s. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

The 1899 Library served the town for nearly a century, until 1996, when the present building was constructed. Since that time, the Old Library has been used sporadically, for town offices when Town Hall was renovated, for recreation offices and programs, and even for Halloween haunted houses, all the while awaiting a new use.

The Architect

Alexander S. Jenney received his architectural training at M.I.T. and began his professional career in the office of America's great 19th century architect, H. H. Richardson. It was in Richardson's office that he met Stanford White, who also worked there in his early professional life. When the prestigious New York firm of McKim, Mead, and White was hired to design the new Boston Public Library in the 1880's, Alexander Jenney and another young Boston architect, Thomas A. Fox, joined the firm's Boston office. For eight years they helped to oversee and implement the design and maintain the high standards of craftsmanship for one of Boston's greatest buildings. Jenney even traveled in 1891 to Europe with Charles Follen McKim and Samuel A.B. Abbott, president of the Library Trustees, to further the design and craftsmen connections for the BPL. This trip to study architectural details and artistry may have been the basis of his predominantly English style for Weston's library.



*Early photograph of the Weston Public Library reading room, c. 1900
(Courtesy Weston Historical Society)*

After the Boston Public Library opened in 1895, Fox and Jenney continued on as architects for the Library Trustees. Their fledgling firm got the job designing the Weston library based in part on the recommendation from Herbert Putnam, former librarian of the BPL, who strongly commended the Boston firm:

The very remarkable experience which as Librarian of the Boston Public Library I had with Messrs Fox, Jenney & Gale interests me, however, very considerably in the promotion of opportunities for them. They are a firm of young men. Both Jenney and Fox were associated with Mr. McKim in the construction of the Boston Public Library, and during the past four years they were the architects of the Trustees; they designed and superintended the alterations in the Old West Church for our branch public library, and they were in entire control of the alterations at the Central Library building upon which \$100,000 has been spent during the past year. They are men of excellent taste, ample education, of extreme integrity and of sincerity and devotion.

In the late 1890s, Jenney purchased a lot in Horace Sears's new subdivision on Pigeon Hill. He built a house at 44 Hilltop Road and became an active participant in town affairs, including serving as Inspector of Buildings. In 1911, he was appointed to the Committee on Improvement of the Center of the Town of Weston, which hired landscape architect Arthur Shurtleff (later Shurcliff) and set in motion the Village Improvement Plan creating the present Town Green. Jenney him-

self designed the 1913 central fire station that was part of the plan, using what was by then the prevailing Georgian/ Colonial Revival style. He built another house on Pigeon Hill, at No. 46 Hilltop Road, before moving to Brookline.

Jenney spent much of his career teaching architecture, first at Harvard, in the early 1910s, and from about 1914 until 1929 at M.I.T. When he died in 1930, his obituary in the *Boston Evening Transcript* noted that he was “widely known in the architectural field.”

Architectural Style

The design for the 1899 Weston Public Library was born of the English Arts & Crafts tradition. The Arts & Crafts movement believed in architecture of good design based on traditional principles, respectful of the past while avoiding slavish imitation. Buildings were to be constructed using local materials and designed to fit into the landscape. The Arts and Crafts reformers emphasized the importance of the individual craftsman in the production of items both beautiful and useful.



The St. Savior's vicarage in England, designed by William Butterfield and built in 1844-45, is an example of how Elizabethan and Jacobean architectural features reappeared in the 19th century, first in England and then in the United States. The kinship with Weston's 1899 library is clear, particularly in the use of brick with limestone trim to set off window groupings and door openings.

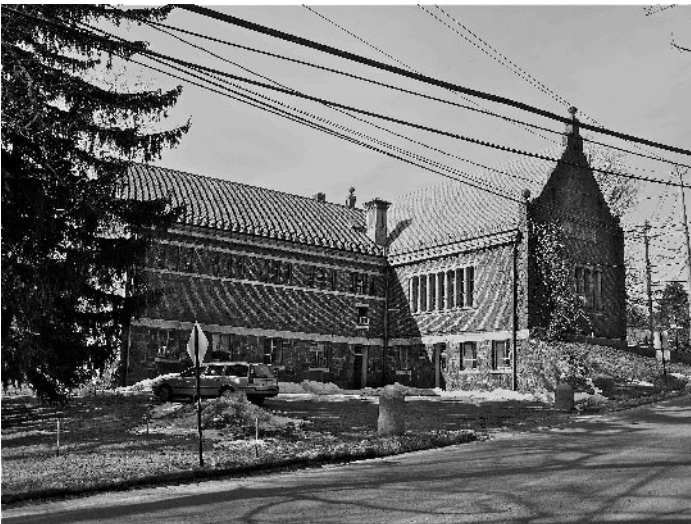
The design vocabulary is drawn from English buildings constructed during the reigns of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and James I (1603-25), the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras of English history. These styles were revived in late 19th century artistic and academic circles. Architectural historians coined the term “Jacobethan” to describe this English Revival style in America. The style can also be described as “Tudor,” a more general term used for buildings inspired by a variety of early English vernacular traditions.

The First Parish Church by architect Robert Peabody also traces its roots to English vernacular architecture. It was standard practice for late 19th and early 20th century architects to roam the English countryside looking for inspiration to bring back to their towns to connect New England to Old England. This “Olde England” Arts & Crafts style became synonymous with wealth, education, and culture.

While the design of the library is predominantly Jacobethan, the entrance and entry hall is curiously classical in the use of classical columns and demi-lune arches. This appears to be a nod to the front entrance of the Boston Public Library, which also has these features, albeit in a much more elaborate form.

Exterior Design Analysis

- Because of the sloping site, the lower level is below ground in the front and above ground at the rear. The fieldstone foundation is visible at the rear. The fieldstones are laid in a pattern called “random ashlar,” meaning that the stones



This photo of the Old Library from School Street shows the fieldstone foundation, limestone water table and horizontal banding, window groupings, and copper chimney vent at the intersection of the main block and ell. (Photo by Pamela W. Fox, 2010)

can be square or rectangular and the sizes vary. The color of the stones ranges from gray to brown.

- Above the foundation, the building is constructed of water-struck brick, manufactured using a technique that produces a subtle color and texture that mimics Colonial period bricks in its hand-made quality.

- The brick is laid in Flemish bond, a pattern that alternates headers (the short side of the brick) with stretchers (the long side). Brick is used for “dentils” along the cornice line. Raised brick is used for the decorative “quoins” which rise up as blocks at the corners.

- Craftsmanship is particularly notable in the brick ends. Each of the upper gable ends contains decorative brickwork consisting of stretcher bond patterns laid on diagonals. A corbelled brick pattern at the upper center forms a base for a recessed rectangular brick panel near the top. This is part of a



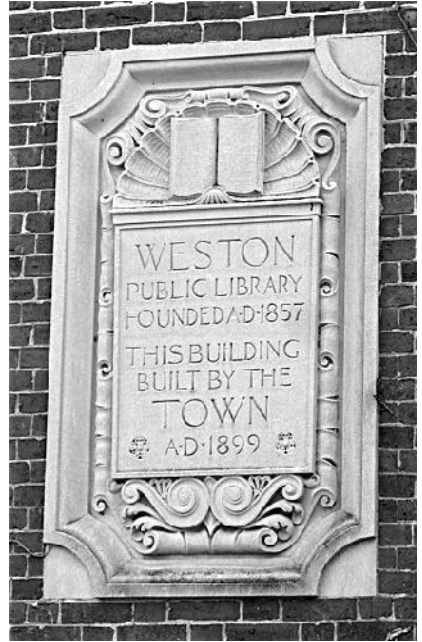
The Arts and Crafts movement emphasized the importance of materials and craftsmanship. The brickwork is particularly notable in the gable ends. (Photo by Pamela W. Fox, 2010)

two-tiered brick and stone-capped terminal that steps up above the gables themselves. Note also the symmetrical metal fleur-de-lis decorations.

- Sheltering the front door is a hood with a copper roof, supported by pairs of large carved wooden brackets.
- The red brick contrasts with the light-colored Indiana limestone trim, which sets off the windows and doors. Horizontal limestone banding is used at the base of the building, at the cornice line, and above and below the windows in the ell. The band along the base is called the “water table” because it protects the foundation from water running down the wall. Limestone is used for the round ball finials, three at each gable end. Limestone is also used for the paired Ionic columns that frame the front door. These are among the classical features that the architect has integrated into the design. The original front door has been replaced. This is one of the few exterior changes.
- Copper is used for gutters, downspouts, and collection boxes. The copper has oxidized to a soft blue-green color. A decorated copper covered chimney vent is

located on the east side near the intersection of the front and back portions of the ell. Copper is also used for the ridge caps.

- Jacobethan and Tudor buildings have steeply pitched roofs, which means that the roof material is very visible. The slate is a soft gray-green color. The shape of the gable at each end is called a “parapeted gable.”
- As is typical of the Jacobethan style, windows are grouped together. The front and back facades each feature a group of seven tall leaded glass windows separated by banded limestone columns, capped by a continuous stone lintel, and seated on a continuous stone sill. At the east end is a group of five such windows.



Plaque on the front facade of the Weston Public Library (Photo by Pamela W. Fox, 2010)

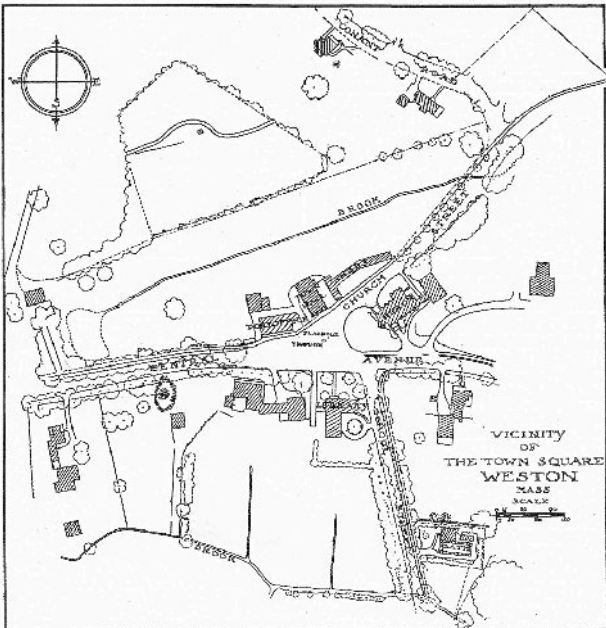
- At the back of the building (the south side) on the gable end, three tall leaded glass windows gridded in a diamond pattern are located in the center on the lower level. These are the centerpiece of a low window seat at the end of the former children’s room inside.
- Above the windows on the east side is an embedded stone plaque that reads, “THE PUBLIC LIBRARY OF THE TOWN OF WESTON”. A more elaborate stone wall plaque embedded to the left of the main entry gives a brief history: “WESTON PUBLIC LIBRARY, FOUNDED AD 1857. THIS BUILDING WAS BUILT BY THE TOWN, 1899”.
- The side entrance was added in the 1920s when the lower level was converted into a children’s room. It is protected by an open timbered gable structure resting on heavy timber posts. This canopy has a slate roof, and beneath it is a concrete bench on the north side and a short “child-sized” wooden door. Engraved in the stone lintel above the entry are the words “IN MEMORY OF ROSAMOND FREEMAN 1893- 1902”.

The Town Green District

The intersection of Boston Post Road, Church Street, and School Street has been the religious and governmental heart of Weston for more than three centuries. In the days when Cutting's general store stood on what is now the Town Green, it was the commercial heart as well. Today, we can "read" the town's history in the architectural landmarks that remain here in this one compact district. In the handful of buildings that frame our Town Green, we see the architectural manifestation of Weston's increasing prominence and prosperity over three centuries.

In the 18th century, when Weston was one of the first stagecoach stops on the Boston Post Road going west, Josiah Smith operated a popular tavern. In singling out what he calls the "Town Green District" in his 2010 book *Metropolitan Boston*, architectural historian Keith Morgan writes: "The principal document of colonial commerce on the Town Green is the clapboard gambrel-roofed Josiah Smith Tavern."

In the late 19th century, the town's transformation from a rural farm town to the "Lenox of the East" is symbolized by two new buildings in the Town Square, the fieldstone First Parish Church (1888) and the red brick Weston Public Library (1899). In these two buildings, the inspiration came from England, in the form of English Revival, a style used in academic and other learned settings. These two buildings were a source of great pride and represented an increased cultural sophistication.



The next step in the evolution of the "Town Square" was the actual redesign of the town center and creation of the Town Green in the 1910s. This time, the goal was nothing less than to create "a village common or green, always found in the best types of old New England villages." While only a decade or so later, the inspira-

Left: Town fathers sent out this plan of the "Town Square" about 1911 to solicit ideas for an improved town center. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)

tion was not England but rather American Colonial Revival. The landscape architect, Arthur Shurtleff (later Shurcliff), wrote in the 1912 *Town Report*:

In my opinion, the execution of this scheme would give Weston a Town Common of remarkable individuality and in many respects the finest open space of its kind in the Commonwealth.

The Town Improvement Plan also included construction of a new fire station (1913) and monumental Town Hall (1917), both designed in the Georgian/Colonial Revival style, as appropriate to the new colonial-style town common. The fire station was designed by Alexander S. Jenney, who had designed the nearby library fifteen years earlier. In 1919, the Gothic Revival St. Julia Church took its place facing the Town Green. Weston gained regional and even national attention for its new “civic center.”

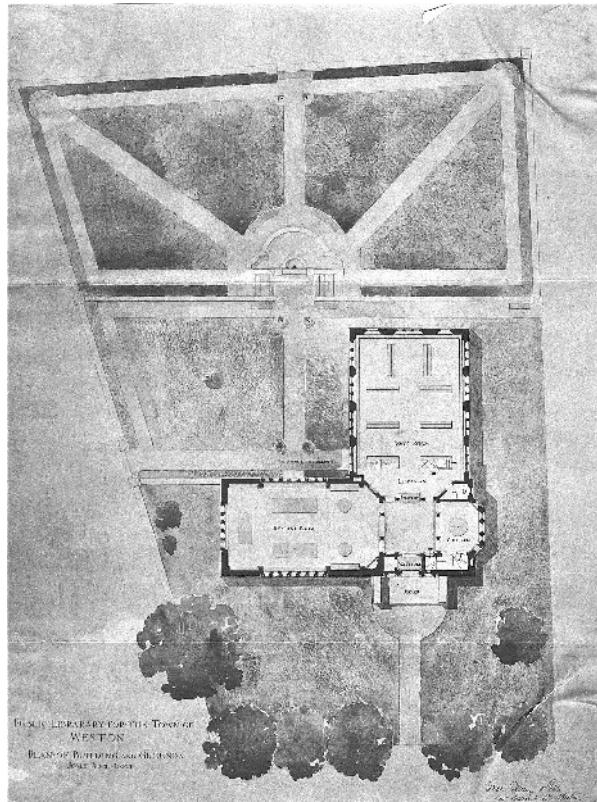
Surrounding this early 20th century Town Green is an ensemble of important buildings representing each of these phases in the town’s growth and development. Each is more ambitious than the example from the previous century, as Weston attracted more and more well-to-do residents. But the common thread is the pride of the citizenry in their town center and the institutions—the church, library, and town hall, standing along with the colonial tavern.

Since the creation of the Town Green a century ago, town leaders have carefully protected this centerpiece of the town. Lamson Park was taken by eminent domain to protect the visual integrity of the Green and Town Hall. A recent addition to the Town Hall was carefully designed to preserve the character of the building. The exterior of the Josiah Smith Tavern was restored in 2006 with Community Preservation Act funds. First Parish Church has carefully guarded the integrity of its handsome stone building, which has several additions in compatible style. Constraints on the library site meant that the 1899 building was never expanded and it maintains its architectural integrity. As a result, the Town Green area looks much like it did a century ago, when town leaders completed their visionary Town Improvement Plan. Now, it is up to us to preserve this legacy.



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Left: View of the Old Library and Josiah Smith Tavern from the Town Green (Photo by Carol Snow, c. 2007) Right: This rather grand Beaux Arts landscape plan was never executed. (Courtesy Weston Historical Society)