

Preservation Assessment

**LEVERETT TOWN HALL
LEVERETT, MASSACHUSETTS**

Prepared for the

TOWN OF LEVERETT / TOWN HALL COMMITTEE

by

Agricola Corporation, Chicopee, MA
Bill Gillen Architects, Amherst, MA

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Scope & Purpose

In December 2009, the Town of Leverett engaged Agricola Corporation (Gregory Farmer, Principal) and Bill Gillen Architects (Bill Gillen, Principal) to conduct a condition assessment of the Leverett Town Hall (1845/1895). The purpose of the study was to document the existing condition of the historic building, identify specific preservation concerns and provide recommendations for priority repairs.

The study was facilitated by Richard Brazeau, chairman of the Leverett Select Board; Theresa Allen, Town Accountant / Town Hall Associate; Les Allen, Town Hall Custodian, and Wendy Foxmyrn, Interim Town Administrator. The consultant gratefully acknowledges the assistance of these individuals and other town residents who compiled background information on the Town Hall and assisted in the discussion of draft recommendations.

The results of the condition assessment are summarized in this report and in the supporting documentation (plans, elevations and photographs). The information is accurate to the best of our knowledge at this time. Any errors of fact or omission are attributed to the limited scope and schedule for this project.

Leverett Town Hall

The Leverett Town Hall is a two-story wood frame building located on the east side of Montague Road in the village center of Leverett. It is a contributing building in the Leverett Center National Register Historic District.

The Town Hall serves as the town's primary public building and administrative headquarters. The first floor contains a large meeting room and kitchen facilities. The second floor contains a large meeting room with a stage at the east end and offices on the periphery.

The Town Hall is owned by the Town of Leverett and maintained and preserved by the Town Hall Custodian under the direction of the Superintendent of Highways Town Buildings & Municipal Grounds and the Leverett Select Board.

History

The Leverett Town Hall was built in 1845 as a one-story building with a single-ridge roofline. The one story building was lifted in 1895 and a new first floor was inserted underneath.

The east end (rear) of the building was extended in 1930 with a two story addition to accommodate a proscenium stage on the upper floor and a reading room / meeting area on the first floor. The addition continues the roofline and wall planes of the main building without interruption. A shallow single-run staircase addition was constructed along the north side about the same time.

In 1968, the Town Hall was expanded with a new town vault and offices in a two-story addition at the northwest corner. The building is served by a private well and a septic system installed about 1970.

As the town's largest public building, the Town Hall has traditionally accommodated a wide range of municipal and community functions. Town boards and commissions use the large meeting room on the second floor for public hearings and regular meeting. When the stage was

operable (before the construction of additional offices in 1977), the second floor auditorium also hosted a wide range of dances, plays and entertainments.

The dining room and kitchen on the first floor were constructed in 1895 to support community dinners, meetings and social events. It is currently used for senior citizen programs, community meals, meetings of clubs and organizations and other social events

The Leverett Town Hall continues to function as the vibrant center of the community. The building fills an important need as municipal offices and as a centrally-located and fully accessible community building.

Physical Description

The Leverett Town Hall is a two-story rectangular timber frame building in the Greek Revival style with a single-ridge gabled roofline. The low stone and concrete foundation is partially visible above grade, especially toward the east end of the building. The roof is covered with standing-seam metal roofing and incorporates a small rectangular louvered vent near the east end.

The exterior of the Town Hall is covered with standard wood clapboards painted white. The corners are ornamented with simple Greek Revival-style pilasters supporting a wide frieze and cornice. The west gable end contains a flush-boarded pediment. A two-story rectangular addition to the building extends from the north side at the western end.

On the west (main) elevation, the Town Hall presents a three-bay façade with a central doorway flanked by single 2/2 windows. The door surround is a simple frame with a modest pediment. Directly above the entrance is a single second-floor window with 12/12 wood sash. The flush-boarded pediment in the gable end contains applied lettering that reads TOWN of LEVERETT / INC 1774. The peak of the gable end is fitted with a louvered triangular vent.

A two-story shed roofed addition on the north side of the building extends the west elevation. The addition features two 6/6 windows on the second floor and a single 2/2 window on the first floor.

On the south (side) elevation, the building closely follows the lot line. The elevation features four regularly-spaced 12/12 windows on the second floor and a smaller fifth window (8/8) in the continuous wall plane of the east end addition. On the first floor, the west elevation has a secondary (kitchen) entrance sheltered by a pent roof supported by simple braces. The fenestration pattern includes three 2/2 windows to the east of the kitchen door and two additional 2/2 windows in the continuous plane of the east addition.

On the east (rear) elevation, the Town Hall has an exposed brick chimney set against the concrete block foundation and extending through the peak of the gable. On either side of the chimney at the first floor level are a pair of 2/2 windows with simple rectangular transoms. A secondary entrance with concrete steps is located at the north extension with a pent roof supported by simple braces. The second story has a single modern casement window to the south of the chimney. Two rectangular louvered vents are set in the wall at the attic level.

The north elevation of the Town Hall is an irregular arrangement of additions to the historic footprint. At the west end, the north elevation shows the two-story clapboarded wall of the office addition fitted with a pair of awning-style windows at the first floor level. Attached directly to

that is the one-story concrete block addition of the town vault with a clapboarded office addition above.

A shallow recess returns to the original plane of the building and incorporates a single window on each floor level. The remaining east end of the north elevation is a shallow addition incorporating a second staircase and an exterior door to the basement. Windows are inserted on both floors near the east and west ends of the staircase addition.

On the interior, the Leverett Town Hall has two finished floors that accommodate public meetings, community functions and town administrative offices. The primary entrance at the west end of the building leads to a large vestibule on the first floor that includes a handicapped-accessible restrooms at the north end, a small elevator serving both floors and a staircase to the second floor at the southwest corner.

Beyond the vestibule, the first floor provides a large open room set up for meetings, dinners and community events. Steel posts inserted in the room supported the floor above. The walls and ceiling are of the main room are covered with horizontal bead board paneling and the floor is laid with hardwood strip flooring. A large kitchen occupies the south side of the first floor.

The Town Clerk's office and town vault are attached on the north side of the first floor. A small reading room or meeting room at the east end of the first floor is separated from the main room by folding doors. The east room contains a brick fireplace in the center of the east wall.

The second floor opens to a large meeting room or auditorium with a simple proscenium stage (with original painted fire curtain) at the east end. The walls are fitted with horizontal plank wainscoting and horizontal bead board paneling. The floor is laid with hardwood strip flooring. Town administrative offices are fit in at the west end (above the vestibule), at the north addition and at the east end (behind the stage area). A single-run staircase along the north side of the building provides secondary egress from the upper floor.

The historic appearance of the Leverett Town Hall has been preserved even as the building has been adapted for the changing needs of the community. The classic Greek Revival building serves to identify the center of Leverett for residents and visitors.

Survey of Existing Conditions

The existing condition survey was conducted in December 2009 and January 2010 by Grgeory Farmer (Agricola Corporation), Bill Gillen and Emily Andersson (Bill Gillen Architects). Technical assistance was provided by Whetstone Engineering of Wendell (Robert Leet, P.E.) and Wood Science Specialists, Inc of Shutesbury (Dr. Stephen Smulski).

The purpose of the assessment was to survey, investigate and document the existing building conditions in order to assist the town in identifying priorities and funding sources for repair of the building. The findings and recommendations of the assessment team are summarized below and in supporting documentation (plans, elevations and photographs).

Note: Please refer to the attached plans, elevations and photographs for visual documentation of existing conditions.

Exterior

Gutters & downspouts – A standing seam metal roof was installed on the Town Hall in 2009; all gutters and downspouts appear to be operating as designed.

Flashings – Chimney and vent flashings were inspected and replaced in conjunction with the 2009 roofing project; there is no evidence of failure.

Chimney – The exposed brick chimney on the east end of the building appears straight and sound. The mortar joints are in good condition. There is minor evidence of spalling on a small number of bricks on the middle section of the exposed chimney.

Siding – The existing clapboard siding on all elevations is functional, but its appearance is heavily compromised by the build-up of old paint. The existing clapboards are a mix of eastern spruce (19th century), western red cedar (20th century) and eastern hemlock (20th century). The siding is heavily coated with multiple layers of oil-based lead paint, oil-base non-lead paint and modern latex paint. The paint layers are alligatored and poorly adhered on all elevations and have failed in numerous areas exposing the bare wood to weathering and erosion.

Cornice – The corner pilasters, wide frieze, shallow cornice and flush-boarded pediment on the Town Hall exhibit the same condition as the clapboard siding. The build-up of old paint has resulted in an alligatored finish with poor adhesion and widespread failure down to bare wood. Heavy paint layers obscure the original profile of the architectural elements and accelerate the effects of weathering and erosion.

Decorative trim – The simple window and door surrounds exhibit some of the same conditions as the clapboard siding and cornice, but to a lesser degree as a result of the 2006 window restoration project. Woodpecker activity at the southeast corner of the building has created a hole in the corner pilaster that is admitting moisture to the corner post and trim.

Windows – The historic double-hung multi-light wood sash throughout the Town Hall were professionally restored in 2006 by Blackburn Restoration Services LLC and Amherst Glass. The primary sash appears to be in good condition and is protected by triple-track white aluminum exterior storm windows on all openings.

Blinds – None existing

Doors – The primary entrance door at the west end is an eight-panel rail and stile wood door. It is coated with multiple layers of incompatible paint and shows the same evidence of deterioration as the siding and other wooden elements. In addition, the bottom rail of the door shows some evidence of rot from moisture and road salt. Secondary doors on the south elevation (installed 2000), the east elevation (installed 2008) and the north elevation exhibit similar weathering and deterioration.

Roofing – The existing standing seam metal roof was installed in 2009 and appears to be functioning properly.

Porches – The pent roofs over the secondary doors (south, east and north elevations) appear to have adequate support and shed water effectively away from the entrances. The entrance on the south elevation would benefit from gutters to divert water away from the area and reduce the formation of winter ice at the entrance.

Paint coating – Siding and trim are coated with multiple layers of lead-based oil paint, non-lead oil paint and modern latex paint. The coatings are extensively cracked, poorly adhered and peeling to bare wood on all elevations. Exposed nail heads are rusted causing additional discoloration to the siding. Paint layers have failed down to bare wood in many areas, caused accelerated weathering and erosion of the siding and trim.

Caulking & sealants – Caulking shows evidence of failure around windows and doors in conjunction with failure of paint coatings.

Structural frame – The wood framing appears generally sound with no immediate evidence of rot or insect infestation, but the first floor shows evidence of severe buckling in two areas across the width of the building. The buckling in the finish floor is unsightly and potentially dangerous as a tripping hazard.

Foundation – The stone foundation under the main building and the concrete foundation under the north and east additions appear to be in good condition with no direct evidence of moisture penetration or mortar failure.

Site drainage – The low foundation on the west end of town hall exposes the skirt boards and siding to poor drainage conditions on the south, west and north sides of the building. On the south side, a small planting bed that has been constructed to absorb roof runoff seems to be functioning well. On the west side, the concrete access ramp and raised grade contribute to splash back and snow pileup that impede proper drainage and cause deterioration of the lower siding and door. On the north side, roof runoff and snow building have caused widespread mildew and biological growth on the foundation and siding.

Evidence of settlement – None detected

Evidence of excessive moisture – None detected except in relation to site drainage (see above). A probe at the base of the wall cavity on two sides (north and south) revealed no excessive dampness in the two sampled locations.

Evidence of pest infestation – None detected.

Interior

Floor plan and modifications – The community dining room, kitchen and reading room on the first floor and the assembly room and stage on the second floor reflect the 1895 remodeling of the Town Hall; the vestibule and offices reflect 20th century modifications. The current floor plan is functional for most purposes although office space is noticeably tight.

Staircases – The L-shaped staircase at the southwest corner and the straight-run staircase at the northeast corner provide access and emergency egress from the second floor; both staircases are in good condition with minor evidence of moisture penetration in the exterior wall of the north stair.

Doors – Interior doors are standard four-panel hinged wooden doors in most locations; all are in good condition with some paint build-up on the doors and hinges.

Trim – Simple flat trim surrounds the doors and windows, all in good condition.

Plaster – None noted; office ceilings and the east end reading room have sheetrock or veneered finishes.

Walls – Horizontal bead board paneling (1895) on the first and second floors with horizontal plank wainscoting (1845) below second floor windows. Bead board paneling shows open joints and bulges from seasonal shrinkage and swelling. Some areas need to be trimmed and refitted. Loose-pack blown-in cellulose was added to the exterior walls in 1981, but the extent of coverage is unknown.

Floors – Hardwood strip flooring on the first and second floors. The first floor shows prominent buckling across the width of the room (north-south axis) at two locations, congruent with the carrying beams. The buckling in the floor is not only visually intrusive, but also poses a distinct tripping hazard for building occupants.

Fireplaces – The brick fireplace at east end appears to be in good condition.

Mechanical Systems

Heating – A new furnace was installed in 2004; no problems noted

Electrical – Modern 400-amp electrical panel; energy efficient light fixtures were installed in 2004. Noted anecdotal complaints of insufficient circuits and receptacles throughout the building, but no evidence of unsafe conditions.

Security & fire detection – Not included in this assessment

Plumbing – Handicapped-accessible lavatories constructed in 2000, new well pump installed 2005. No problems noted.

Landscape

Outbuildings - None

Garden structures – Granite bench set in front of building at west end

Fences, walls or gates – Low fieldstone walls adjacent to street and driveway at west end

Water features - None

Monuments or sculptures – None noted

Circulation systems – Two-stop elevator (2001) and two functional staircases, all in good condition.

Lighting – Wall-mounted iron carriage lamps at west entrance crafted by local artisan Paul Woodard in 1973; good condition

Site furnishings – Ground-mounted flagpole at west end of building

Potential archaeological features – The footprint of the Town Hall occupies nearly the entire parcel. The immediate perimeter has been disturbed by foundation repairs, building additions, planting beds and parking areas. Archaeological potential in the immediate area is presumed to be low.

Planning & Recommendations

The condition assessment of the Leverett Town Hall completed in February 2010 determined that the building is in generally good condition and has been responsibly maintained in recent years. Concerns about the current condition of the Town Hall focused on two specific areas:

Exterior cladding & trim – The clapboard siding and trim details have deteriorated to a point where they need to be stripped to bare wood and prepared for repainting. The build-up of paint layers has caused the failure of finishes on all elevations, exposing the wood to accelerated weathering and erosion.

Any paint applied to the existing exterior surface is bound to fail in a short period. There are two possible treatments –

- a) *Remove all existing coatings to bare wood* using a chemical paint stripper and sharp hand scrapers, following all applicable laws and regulations for lead-based coatings. Avoid any abrasive grinding, high-pressure washing or sandblasting. Lightly hand sand the exposed surfaces to remove the weathered wood and prepare the surface for painting. Spot-apply a rust inhibitor to all nail heads. Refinish all exterior wood elements with a brush-applied oil-base primer containing a stain blocker and a mildewcide followed by two brush-applied topcoats of 100% acrylic latex paint containing a stain blocker and mildewcide.
- b) *Remove all existing siding and trim*, setting aside the trim details (corner pilasters, cornice, window and door surrounds) for reinstallation. Inspect, repair or replace any deteriorated building sheathing or flashings, particularly around the window and door openings. Install new insulation and housewrap on the walls, then install new siding and trim on all elevations to match the material, profile and dimension of the historic elements. The new siding should be factory-primed on all six surfaces with an oil-base primer containing a stain blocker and a mildewcide. All site-cut ends and edges must be field-primed with a compatible oil-base primer prior to installation. Siding and trim should be hand-fastened with ring-shank nails, then field coated with two brush-applied topcoats of 100% acrylic latex paint containing a stain blocker and a mildewcide.

The first treatment has the advantage of preserving most of the existing historic fabric on the building while still providing a durable painted finish. The second treatment is more extreme and would only be justified if further inspection found evidence of widespread rot and deterioration within the walls.

Interior floor bulges – The buckling of the hardwood strip flooring on the first floor appears to be related to a) the lack of a vapor barrier in the crawl space below the floor and b) the parallel layout of both the sub-floor and the finish floor. Variations in seasonal moisture in the soil below can cause the flooring to expand and buckle. Since the finish floor is parallel rather than perpendicular to the sub-floor, both layers respond to moisture by buckling in the same direction. Once the floor has buckled, it never fully returns to its original position.

The red oak and chestnut timbers beneath the first floor appear to be in good condition and do not currently require repair or additional support. The recommended remedy for the buckling is to remove a portion of the finish floor in order to plane down the bulge in the sub-floor and resecure it to the framing with screws. The finish floor can then be refitted and reinstalled on the sub-floor.

In conjunction with these repairs, the assessment team also recommends:

- 1) Paint history – Paint sampling and microscopic analysis can provide a record of the paint history of the original (1845) building and the later expansion (1895). Most public buildings of the period show a wide range of whites (from creamy yellow to cool blue) and occasional polychromatic treatments, especially on the doors, windows and architectural trim. Much of the paint history will be lost in conjunction with the recommended exterior repairs, so there is a limited opportunity to document and record the historic finishes.
- 2) Drainage improvements – Additional subsurface drainage and regrading may be required to prevent moisture damage to exterior wood elements and extend the life of painted finishes. A more detailed site survey and soil evaluation will help to determine the appropriate type and location of drainage improvements that may be needed.
- 3) Inspection of wall insulation – The blown-in cellulose installed in 1981 may not have filled all cavities or may have settled over time. Further inspection of the walls and measurement of the moisture content will help to determine whether the current insulation is causing any condensation problems and whether additional insulation might be warranted.
- 4) Repair of interior beadboard paneling – The horizontal beadboard paneling along the perimeter walls (1st & 2nd floor) has buckled in some areas due to seasonal swelling and shrinkage of the wood. While the effect is unsightly, it does not seem to indicate any significant moisture or deterioration in the wall structure. The paneling in the affected areas can be removed, trimmed and refitted to reduce the effect, but future shrinkage may expose thin gaps between the panels during the winter heating season.

With attention to these issues, the Leverett Town Hall should require only normal maintenance for the next 5-10 years unless there are significant changes in the pattern of use.

Summary

The Leverett Town Hall continues to function well as a community building and as the town's administrative offices. While both floors are heavily utilized by town officers and the community at large, the history of regular maintenance has helped to keep the building in good condition overall.

On the exterior the deteriorated paint which gives the building a shabby appearance can only be corrected by extensive surface preparation or siding replacement before repainting. On the interior, the seasonal shrinkage of wall paneling and finish flooring can be addressed by carpentry repairs without significant alteration to the character of the building.

Leverett Town Hall, Leverett, MA

The Town of Leverett has an admirable record of maintaining and improving the Town Hall in response to the changing needs of the community. The tradition of conscientious stewardship can continue to preserve the appearance and function of the historic building for many years to come.

ATTACHMENTS

- Photographs of Existing Conditions (2010) – 34 views with location key
- Architectural plans of existing building configuration (A1, A2, A3)
- Architectural elevations of existing exterior configuration (A4, A5, A6, A7)
- Initial cost estimate for proposed repairs (Bill Gillen Architects, Jan. 27, 2010)
- Letter from Whetstone Engineering (Jan. 28, 2010) re: first floor framing
- Letter from Wood Science Specialists, Inc. (Jan. 19, 2010) re: exterior siding and 1st floor framing