

LOWELL CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

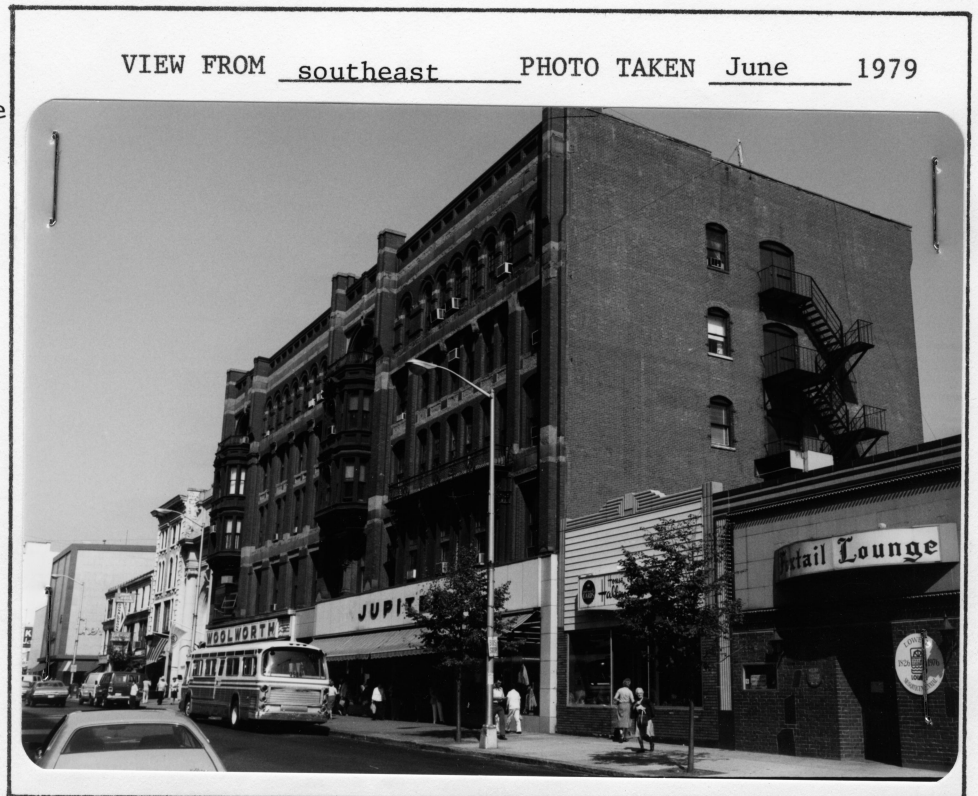
IDENTIFICATION 45 MERRIMACK STREET MAP SHEET # 8
 1) CURRENT OWNER S. S. Kresge Company OWNER OCCUPIED no
 2) HISTORIC NAME Hildreth Building
 3) CURRENT NAME Hildreth Building/Woolworths, Jupiter
 4) PROPERTY TYPE commercial 5) ZONING CLASSIFICATION B3
 6) TAXES: PAYMENTS current STATUS clear
 7) WITHIN BOUNDARIES OF LHPD, Merrimack-Middle Streets HD

HISTORICAL ABSTRACT

1) CONSTRUCTION DATE 1882-1884
 SOURCE documented: Lowell Illustrated; Old Residents
 2) ARCHITECT OR BUILDER Van Brunt & Howe, Boston
 3) HISTORIC OWNER Fisher A. Hildreth Heirs (1882)
 4) ORIGINAL USE: GF commercial UF commercial
 5) PREVIOUS BLDGS ON PROPERTY yes DATE 1873-1882
 SOURCE documented; local histories (see attached bibliography)

DESCRIPTIVE DATA

1) ARCHITECTURAL STYLE 1t. 19th C. com/Qu.Anne
 2) PRESENT USE:
 GF commercial
 UF commercial
 3) NO OF STORIES 5
 4) PROP SQ FT 10,402
 5) PLAN polygonal (4)
 6) ROOF flat
 7) STRUCTURAL SYSTEM
metal frame
 8) OUTBUILDINGS
2 attached at rear
 9) MATERIALS:
 FOUNDATION



FACADE all sides: red brick and stretcher bond
 TRIM balcony: metal oriels (painted green); stone, granite and brownstone
 10) NOTABLE SURFACE & LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS none

ADDRESS 45 MERRIMACK STREET

VISUAL ASSESSMENT

- 1) CONDITION OF BUILDING FABRIC good
- 2) IF DETERIORATED, CAUSES n/a
- 3) INTEGRITY OF HISTORIC BLDG FABRIC: GF major but revers changes
UF intact with minor changes
- 4) SURROUNDING LAND USES commercial, industrial, residential
- 5) INTEGRITY OF PROP'S HIST SETTING intact with minor intrusions &/or losses
- 6) IMPORTANCE OF PROP TO HIST SETTING focal point in area (See Add. Info.)

ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTION

See Research Report.

ADDITIONAL HISTORICAL INFORMATION

See Research Report.

ARCHEOLOGICAL COMMENT

The Hildreth Building covers its site. Due to its size it is extremely doubtful that the property contains subsurface remains from previous structures.



View from: South. Photo taken: June, 1979.

Research Report
45 Merrimack Street
Hildreth Building
1882-84

The Hildreth Building is a dominant downtown building, quite large with a very rich and plastic facade. The structure rises five stories and spans the central third of the long block on the north side of Merrimack Street between John and Bridge streets. Its mass is that of a large, flat-topped, roughly trapezoidal box. Strong vertical and horizontal articulation is expressed by pilasters and horizontal bonding, with much wall area given over to glazing. The wall is punctuated with asymmetrically placed oriel windows, a variety of window designs, small scale classical details, and with a diversity of surface texture and colors. All of these elements are characteristic of a commercial building in the Queen Anne style, the culmination of Victorian eclecticism.

The first floor of the Hildreth has been modernized. The storefronts of Jupiter and Woolworth have plate glass, aluminum frame windows and enameled metal paneling. Woolworth's portion has a granite base and a striped awning, 20th century additions which recall 19th century styles. The wall above the storefronts is organized around a central bay, framed with projecting piers and featuring a two story oriel at the third and fourth floors. The left (west) end of the facade has an identical bay with oriel, framed by piers, while the right end looks incomplete, with a single projecting pier. The lack of a full bay and oriel on the right results in a curiously unbalanced facade.

The building was constructed in two stages, with the incomplete-appearing right side begun in 1882, and the left side started soon after the right was built, around 1884. (The history of the building is discussed more fully below). The design seems to have been conceptualized as a whole, and a perspective view of the design published in 1883, before the building was completed, shows the off-balanced facade.

While the two oriel bays are identical in design, the ranges of wall right and left of the central bay vary in many details. The right (east) portion of the facade

between the central bay and the right end pier has a broad window bay at each end, and three groups of narrower windows between the end bays. On the second floor the broad end windows are rectangular, and between them are three shallow, canted bay windows. Above those three is an ornate wrought iron balcony. On the second and third floors, all the windows are topped with segmental arches. The broad end windows are set off from the three pairs of narrow windows between them by projecting piers that span the two floors. At the top floor, all eight round-headed windows are of the same size, but one at each end is set off a bit from the central six, which are joined at the springline.

The left side of the facade, between the two bays with oriels, has four main vertical divisions. The second floor has four, regularly spaced, rectangular windows. Piers divide the third and fourth floors into four bays, each has a pair of segmental-arched windows on each floor. The top floor has eight evenly-spaced, round-headed windows, all joined at the springline.

The bays with oriels have twin round-headed windows on the second floor, with the curved support of the oriel extending down between them. The green-painted metal oriels decorate the third and fourth floors, and are topped with wrought iron railings. At the fifth floor each bay has a single, wide arch which springs from floor level, and is divided by mullions and set with several small windows.

The piers flanking the oriel bays and marking the right end of the facade all project above the panelled parapet of brick and brownstone that tops the facade. Other horizontal elements are the broad bands of granite between brownstone strips that cross the facade between the second and third, and fourth and fifth floors, and as a frieze atop the fifth floor, below the parapet. The red pressed brick field of the wall surface is enlivened with dark green-painted metal bays, cornice, and iron railings, as well as by granite and brownstone. Unfortunately, the soft brown sandstone has severely deteriorated, so that its original richly carved surface texture has become quite flat. Most of the stone ornamentation shown in historic photos (Fig. 5 & 6) is missing altogether. It included small scrolled pediments on the piers above the storefronts. One lone example survives near the west (left) end of the facade. Stone caps topped the piers above the cornice, and classical balustrades stood atop the oriel bays.

The right and side wall has a fire escape with a segmental-arched door. The simple rear facade angles out at the west end and features regular bays of segmental-arched windows, a few of which have been altered.

The Jupiter and the Woolworth stores extend through the building into attached 20th century buildings which front on Paige Street (105, 115-119, & 125-127 Paige).

The Hildreth Building is the latest in a long line of structures on this site. The first building recorded as occupying a portion of this site was the Gothic Revival style First Freewill Baptist Church, constructed in 1837 at a cost of approximately \$20,000 (Fig. 1). It stood at the left (west) end of the Merrimack St. frontage (Fig. 1). This church was organized in 1833, and in 1846 due to "...financial difficulties and embarrassments..." the group sold the building to the Lowell Museum. The spire was removed that same year (1).

The Museum was established in 1840 by one Moses Kimball. He found the business unprofitable, sold out in 1845 to N. F. Gates, who in 1846 moved the Museum into the former church (Fig. 2), and adapted the facility for "dramatic entertainments," as well as for the display of a collection of curiosities. Holding dramas in a former church raised a public outcry, and in 1847 Gates' license to hold plays was revoked. After considerable debate, and with the support of signatures from 2,200 voters, the license was renewed (2).

The Museum flourished, and in 1850 was incorporated (Fig. 2) (Fig. 2). Fisher A. Hildreth was a stockholder and director. Soon after, the building burned and was repaired. Again in 1853, and 1855, the structure burned (3). After the latter fire, the building was rehabilitated to house a lecture hall, offices, and the post office (4). In 1865 there was a fourth fire. Its severity forced reconstruction, after which the building was known as the Post Office Building or Block (Fig. 3). It was a 5-story brick commercial structure. In 1878 a five circuit telephone office, apparently Lowell's first, was opened in this building (5).

In 1882 the building occupying the eastern half of the site was torn down. It was a four-story brick building, constructed ca. 1850-1879 according to Lowell city maps and atlases, and had housed the Harris Hotel. Construction was begun on half of the Hil

was begun on half of the Hildreth Building that same year to house the Post Office, and the next year the Post Office opened in its new space. Then the old Post Office Building was demolished, and the western half of the Hildreth Building was put up. It was completed in 1884. An early tenant of the Hildreth Building was S. H. Knox & Company, a variety chain store that preceded Woolworth's.

Fisher Ames Hildreth was born in Dracut, Massachusetts, in 1818, the only son of Israel Hildreth, physician, and Dolly Dolly Jones Hildreth. He held several local offices in Dracut and moved to Lowell in 1845, where he entered the newspaper publishing business. He published the Republican, and merged the Advertiser and Patriot into the Lowell Patriot. The two papers were under his ownership and management until their publication was suspended in 1863 (6).

In 1850 Hildreth was appointed High Sheriff, and became a director and stock holder of the newly incorporated Lowell Museum. He was appointed eighth postmaster of Lowell in 1853, by President Pierce, and retained the office under Buchanan. During the next postmaster's administration the Post Office remained on Merrimack in Hildreth's old Post Office Building. It then moved into the new Hildreth which was constructed by the heirs of Fisher A. Hildreth; he died in Lowell ten years before it was built, in 1873 (7).

The architects of the Hildreth Building were Van Brunt & Howe, of Boston (Fig. 4) (8). Henry C. Van Brunt was born in Boston and he began his architectural training there. He then trained in the New York office of Richard M. Hunt. Upon returning to Boston after serving in the Civil War, he established the partnership of Ware & Van Brunt. This firm designed many public buildings in the Boston area including Memorial Hall, Weld Hall and the east wing of the College Library at Harvard, Episcopal Seminary in Cambridge, the First Unitarian Church (later Congregational) in Boston, Mudge Memorial Church in Swampscott, Grace Church in New Bedford, and the old Union Station in Worcester. In 1881 Van Brunt became head of the new MIT Department of Architecture. In 1883 the partnership of Van Brunt and Howe was formed; the connection with Ware was dissolved in 1883 (9).

Frank M. Howe was born in Arlington, Massachusetts in 1849, and educated at MIT, perhaps in the new Department of Architecture. He was a draftsman in the firm of Ware & Van Brunt in the 1870's, and several of his early drawings appeared in the new professional magazine, the American Architect and Building News (10).

Van Brunt & Howe moved their office to Kansas City in 1885, primarily to design for the Union Pacific Railroad in the Midwest and the West. Their work included U.P.R.R. stations in Portland, Oregon; Denver, Colorado; Sioux City; and Omaha, Nebraska. They also designed several buildings at the St. Louis Exposition (of 1904); the Electrical Exhibit Building at the Chicago World's Fair Columbian Exposition; the City Library and the Cornerstone Baptist Church, Cambridge; the Mortuary Chapel at Forest Hills Cemetary, Boston; Emanuel Church, Shelbourne Falls; the Gilbert R. Payson residence in Watertown; and several office buildings, churches, and residences in Kansas City. Successors to this firm were Howe, Hoit & Cutler, and Howe & Hoit, both of Kansas City. Henry Van Brunt was elected president of the American Institute of Architects in 1899, and he died in Milton, Massachusetts in 1903. Frank M. Howe remained in Kansas City and died there in 1909.

The Hildreth Building has retained its commercial use, and still houses downtown stores and offices. It appears to be very well-maintained and in good structural condition, in spite of some severe erosion of the brownstone on its Merrimack St. front. The importance of the building is based in part on its size--being one of the largest downtown structures--and on its location at the head of Central St., which it exploits as a focal point of the vistas along Central Street and along lower Merrimack St. The Hildreth Building is, perhaps, the most architecturally significant late 19th century commercial building in downtown Lowell. Its design is the product of one of the most sophisticated architectural offices of its era. The firm of Van Brunt & Howe was of national significance for its contribution to the Union Pacific Railroad and the Chicago World's Fair. Van Brunt's association with M.I.T. involved him with a key program in the drive to professionalize American architectural practice in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The Hildreth Building also has significant local historical association as the site of an early church, museum, and post office. Fisher A. Hildreth was an important member of the mid-19th century community as a newspaper publisher, sheriff, and postmaster.

Footnotes

- 1) Drake, History of Middlesex County, V.II, p. 109.
- 2) Charles Cowley, A Hand Book of Business in Lowell, with a History of the City, 1856, pp. 116-8.
- 3) Ibid.
- 4) Lowell Illustrated, p. 52.
- 5) U. of Lowell Library, Special Collections, Vertical file.
- 6) Illustrated History of Lowell, 1897, p. 427.
- 7) Contributions to the Old Residents' Historical Association, v.4, pp. 137-139.
- 8) American Architect & Building News, v.14, p. 30, plate 395, July 21, 1883.
- 9) Whitney, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased), pp. 614-15.
- 10) Ibid., p. 303.

Sources

Lowell city maps and atlases.

Lowell city directories, 1837-1895.

U. of Lowell Special Collections photo files.

Views of Lowell and Vicinity. Published for S. H. Knox & Co., Lowell; by L. H. Nelson Co., Portland, ME: 1904.

Lowell Illustrated. Compiled by Frank P. Hill. Lowell: 1884, pp. 51, 52, and illustration.

American Architect and Building News. v.14, p. 30, pl. 395, July 21, 1888.

Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased). Harry F. Whitney, A.I. A., and Elsie Rathburn Whitney. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc.; 1970, pp. 303, 614-15.

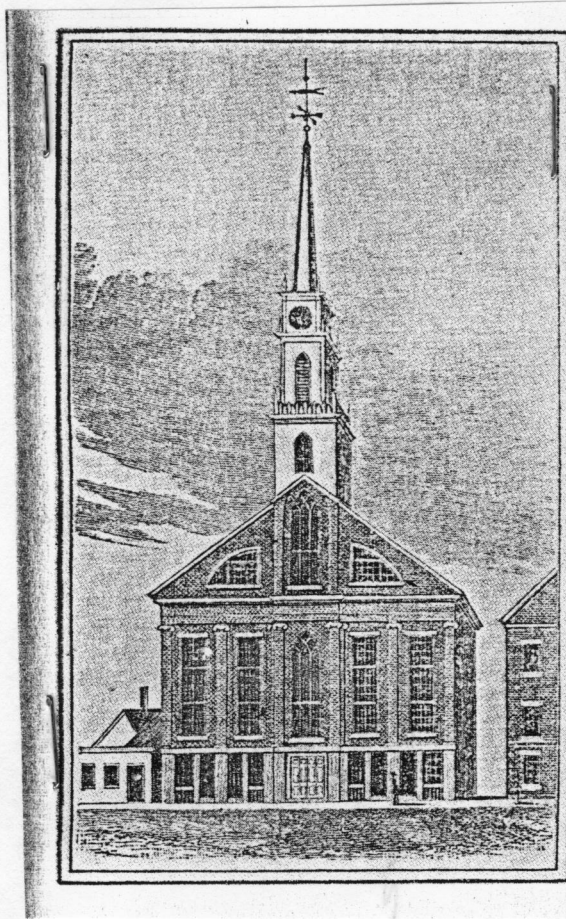


Fig. 40.
First Freewill Baptist Church, Lowell,
Built in 1837

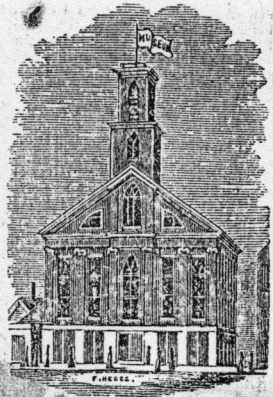
Figure 1

Coolidge, John, Mill & Mansion, 1942.

LOWELL MUSEUM.

ESTABLISHED
1840.

INCORPORAT'D
1850.



Located on
Merrimack, at
the head of
Central Street.

Contains a great number of Old and Valuable Oil Paintings, Engravings, Statuary, Wax Figures, of noted characters; Minerals, Fish, Shells, Reptiles, Fossils; more than 1,000 Medallions of eminent persons, Coats of Arms, Designs, &c.; an immense collection of Birds and Animals, from all parts of the world; nearly one hundred Cosmorama Views of Cities, Harbors, Villas, Pleasure Grounds, and various other Scenes. Added to which is a spacious and splendidly decorated Saloon, capable of seating nearly 1,000 persons comfortably; with a beautiful Stage, an excellent stock of scenery, with all the properties, wardrobes, appointments, &c., for dramatic effect; in which is given each evening and Saturday afternoons, Theatrical performances by a talented and well selected Dramatic Company, assisted by several artists and an Orchestra, unsurpassed by any in the country; giving facilities to the management for producing any play in the whole range of the Drama, in a style which is not surpassed by any place of amusement in the country. In the evening, the place is illuminated with gas throughout. The price of admission to this vast and interesting Collection of Curiosities and an Evening Entertainment, is but 25 cents. On all holidays, extra attractions are offered, and several performances given. The great and still growing popularity and patronage of this establishment, renders it necessary at no distant day to enlarge the premises; and it is in contemplation by the corporation to erect a new and more spacious building the next season.

Figure 2

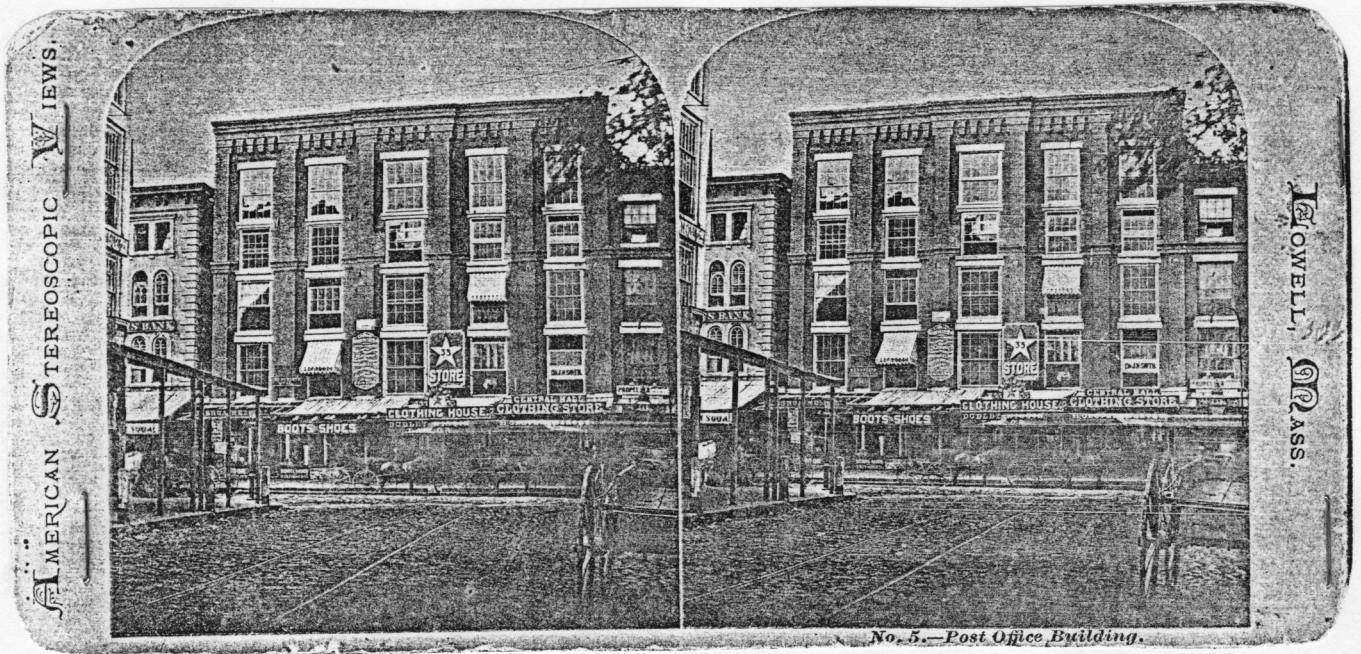


Figure 3

U. of Lowell Library, photo file.

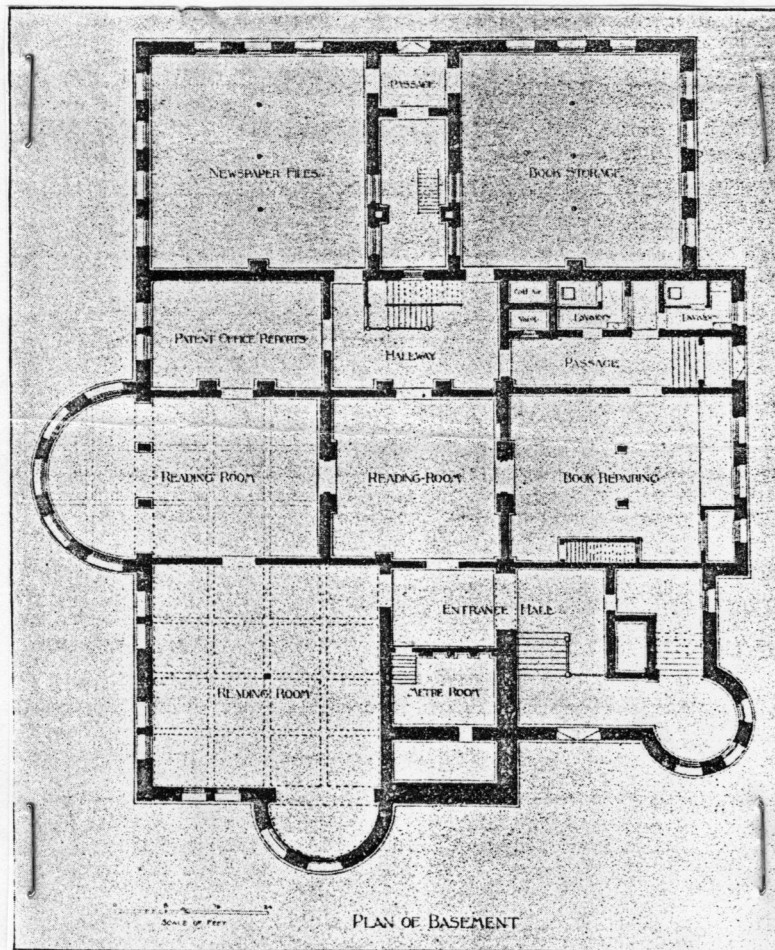


Figure 3

The Story of the City Hall Commission, Prentiss Webster, Ed., 1894.

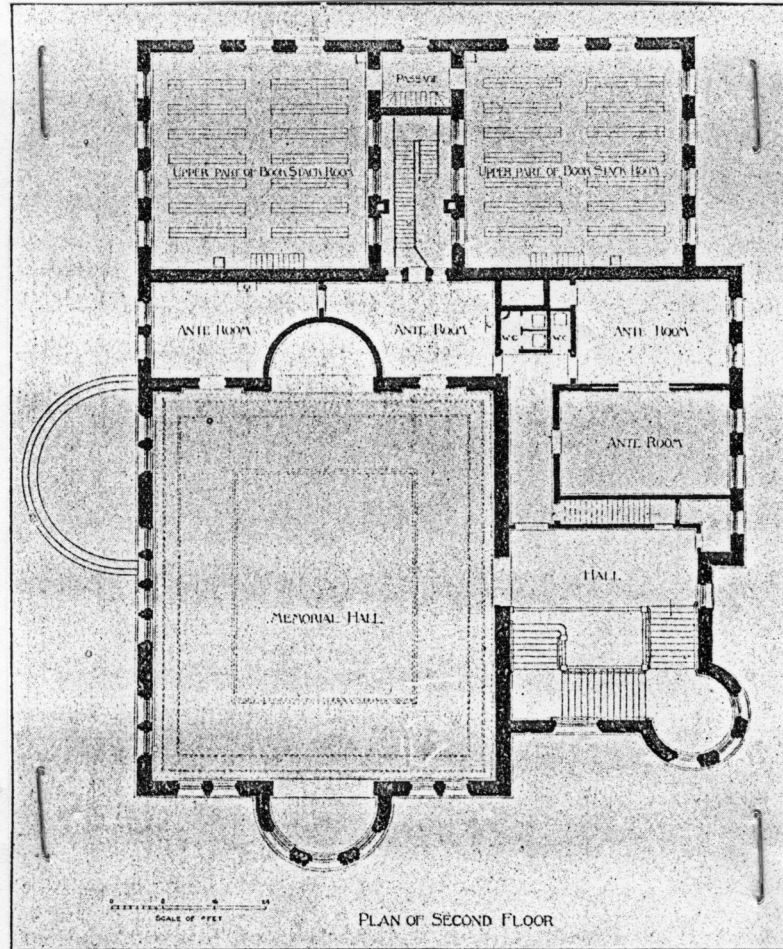
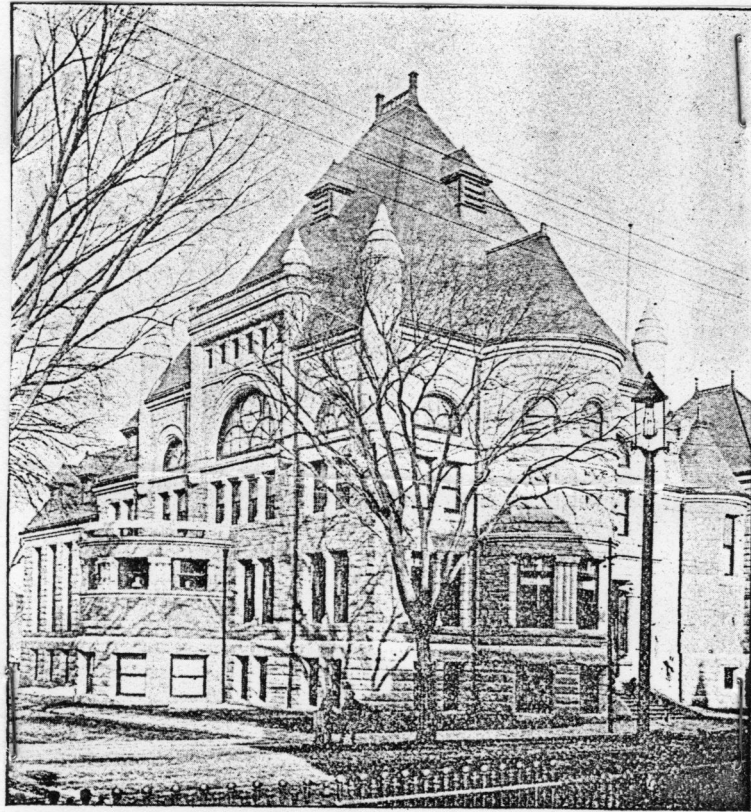


Figure 4

The Story of the City Hall Commission, Prentiss Webster, Ed., 1894.



MEMORIAL HALL.

Figure 5

The Story of the City Hall Commission, Prentiss Webster, Ed. 1894.