

Nichols Memorial Library

Article 2: Architecture

Our first article about Nichols Memorial Library focused on the history of the library as it fulfilled the growing needs of the town. Now let's enjoy the lines and materials of this unique building donated in 1898 by Howard Nichols to the memory of his parents. Designed by Dwight & Chandler, Boston, the building is unusual for our area: irregular native stones, a steep red slate roof, a copper-capped hip roof. (*History of Kingston*, KIHS, 1994) However the architectural style was not uncommon for the times. The building is a small elegant example of Richardson Romanesque style characterized by a heavy appearance in both shape and materials. The massive roof is proportionately equal in area to the wall surface with eaves that project and ridge lines that are decorated with copper finials at the peaks (*Historic Preservation Assistance Project, Strafford Rockingham Regional Council 1983*). The granite blocks add to the heavy style, and there is even a small stout tower with windows that gives an air of medieval times. Yet the whole façade is divided into three equal elements which combine pleasantly to balance one another.

Now let's take a tour inside. As you walk up the granite steps and grasp the brass doorknob, you'll feel the heft of the thick, handsome oak door. Stepping inside you'll experience a soothing combination of dark and light: heavy dark oak beams, oak wainscoting and massive Georgia pine post trusses and purlins (the horizontal roof beams that support the rafters) frame the interior. However expanses of windows let in light and there is a feeling of openness as the beams draw your eye up to the 11 stained glass windows around the reading room. Each window features a printer's mark, an early "branding" to identify the printer's work, assuring the quality and authenticity of the printing house. These marks were commonly used at the time of the construction of our library "to decorate the structure to symbolize its noble intent as the repository of books and printed matter" (*Self-guided Tour of NML Stained Glass Windows*) Each window includes an artistic design, or perhaps a reference to the printer's native land, in shades of blue, gold and soft green that filter light into the reading room below.

Originally a one-story structure, the library's popularity inspired staff and trustees to promote the remodeling of the basement for a children's room in 1969. However if you're headed downstairs, duck your head or you'll encounter those beautiful local stones with a rather sharp smack! This room is as practical and efficiently laid out as space allows, but begs for light and openness.

Once you've captured the feeling of this remarkable library – the textures, the colors, the materials – be sure to observe the ways the new library on Church Street honors those characteristics in its design...starting with the bold, likeable red roof. What an excellent offspring for our venerable Nichols Memorial Library!