

# Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System

## Scanned Record Cover Page

<b>Inventory No:</b>	SMV.65
<b>Historic Name:</b>	West Somerville Branch Library
<b>Common Name:</b>	West Somerville Andrew Carnegie Branch Library
<b>Address:</b>	40 College Ave
<b>City/Town:</b>	Somerville
<b>Village/Neighborhood:</b>	Davis Square
<b>Local No:</b>	100, 127, 16-F-16
<b>Year Constructed:</b>	1909
<b>Architect(s):</b>	McLean and Wright
<b>Architectural Style(s):</b>	Classical Revival
<b>Use(s):</b>	Community Center; Library
<b>Significance:</b>	Architecture; Community Planning; Education
<b>Area(s):</b>	SMV.AY: Somerville Multiple Resource Area
<b>Designation(s):</b>	Local Historic District (03/11/1985); Nat'l Register MRA (09/18/1989); Nat'l Register Individual Property (09/18/1989); Preservation Restriction (06/17/2004)
<b>Building Materials(s):</b>	Roof: Asphalt Shingle Wall: Brick; Limestone; Stone, Cut Foundation: Brick



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Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts Historical Commission  
220 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, Massachusetts 02125  
[www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)

This file was accessed on: Friday, May 15, 2020 at 11:32 AM

PR-6/11/04

MANUAL 9/18/89 (IC)  
BHD 3/11/85 (IC)

# FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Assessor's Number 16-F-16 USGS Quad BOST Area(s) Davis Form Number SMV.427 65

Town Somerville

Place (neighborhood or village) Davis Square

Address 40 College Avenue

Historic Name West Somerville Branch Library

Uses: Present Public Library and Community Center  
Original Public Library

Date of Construction 1909

Source plans

Style/Form Roman Revival

Architect/Builder McLean and Wright, Boston

Exterior Material: Buff colored Roman shaped brick  
Foundation brick

Wall/Trim Limestone quoins, sills and door and window lintels, with wood windows and front doors

Roof asphalt and EPDM

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures n/a

Major Alterations (with dates) 2003: major stabilization work on exterior, including: masonry cleaning & repairs, repair of downsprouts, reinforcement of roof structure, window restoration & weather stripping, and repainting of windows & tympanum. Interior work included: repair and stabilization of walls & ceilings, repainting of two reading rooms and the stairwell, and wallpapering of a small reference room.

Condition Exterior-excellent; Interior-needs system upgrades and building accessibility.

Moved  no  yes Date

Acreage .41

Setting Urban, on periphery of Davis Square Central Business District.

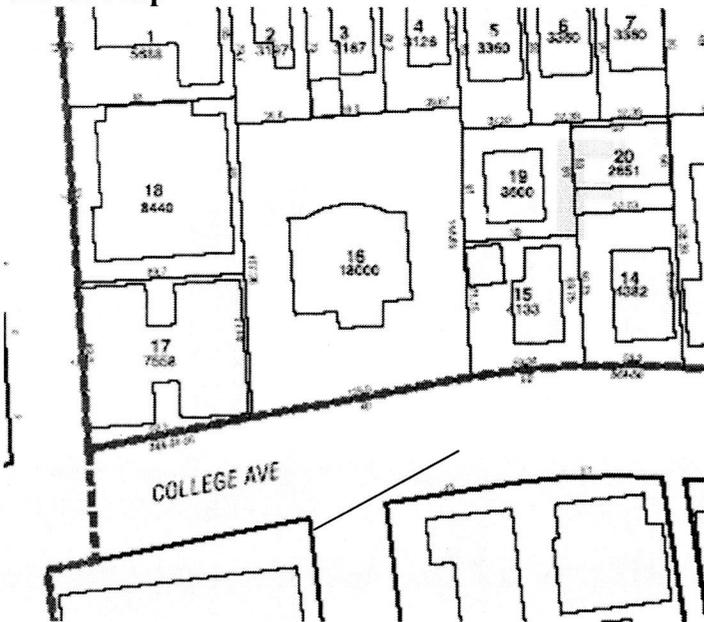
## Photograph

(3" x 3" or 3-1/2" x 5" black and white only) Label photo on back with town and property address. Record film roll and negative numbers here on the form. Staple photo to left side of form over this space. Attach additional photos to continuation sheets.

Roll Negative(s)

	2a,5a,7a,8
886	a,9a
85	

## Sketch Map



Recorded by Carole Zellie; Brandon Wilson

Organization Landscape Research; Somerville HPC  
Director

Date (month / year) 12/80; 9/04

**RECEIVED**

OCT 19 2004

**MASS. HIST. COMM**

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

**BUILDING FORM****ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION**  *see continuation sheet*

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

Architecturally, the library is a prime example of the Neo-classical style, and resembles the late-Italian Renaissance Villa Capra by Palladio. The design of McLean and Wright, a Boston based architectural firm, was chosen from among 35 competitive submissions for the building.

This unique and artistic Roman Revival public facility was constructed in 1909. The Library is 1 and 1/2 stories high with two curved bay windows symmetrically placed on either side of the entrance portico. This entranceway is ornamented with a triangular pediment carried by fluted Ionic columns and broad pilasters. The yellow brick structure with distinguishing limestone quoins, lintels, sills and belt coursing also has a detailed dentilled cornice which carries around the building, into a full raking cornice. The two rounded bays projecting from the side facades of the building house a pair of generous reading rooms, complete with working fireplaces. Lamps of learning adorn the cornice and an acroterian is located at the pinnacle of the roof. The pediment is further ornamented with an open book surrounded by a laurel wreath, the ancient symbol of victory. Vines and flowers spring from the book in reference to reading as the root that leads to the flowering of civilization. Similar examples of the Neoclassical style elsewhere in Somerville have been altered.

**HISTORICAL NARRATIVE**  *see continuation sheet*

*Discuss 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.*

The West Somerville Branch Library was listed on the State Register of Historic Places in 1986 and on the National Register in 1989. In 1989, it was also designated as being located within an historic multiple resource area, Davis Square. The Library opened in 1909 and retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and feeling, as well as associations with Somerville's municipal building program and extreme growth at the turn of the century.

Historically, the Library maintains local, regional and national associations. Its local and regional importance derives from its connection to Samuel Walter Foss, who headed the Somerville library system during a time when its circulation in the State was second only to Boston. Known as a progressive librarian, Mr. Foss introduced the concept of open stacks to the City, renewal by mail and telephone, the loaning of books to other civic institutions, such as schools, churches and prisons, and many other activities. He was also a recognized author and poet, most notably of "The House by the Side of the Road," as well as a strong civic leader.

Of national interest is the Library's association with the philanthropy of Andrew Carnegie, who donated \$25,000 for the Library's construction in 1908. The finished building is a clear example of the "Greek Temples of Learning" design which Carnegie stopped funding shortly after this Library's erection. The bequest of Carnegie funds had a major impact on the development of the public library system, as fully half of the public libraries in the nation today were started as Carnegie libraries.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**  *see continuation sheet*

Miscellaneous newspaper clippings, West Somerville Branch Library files, and Carnegie Libraries, Their History and Impact on American Public Library Development by George S. Bobinski.

**INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET**

Town Somerville Property Address 40 College Ave

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area(s) Form No.

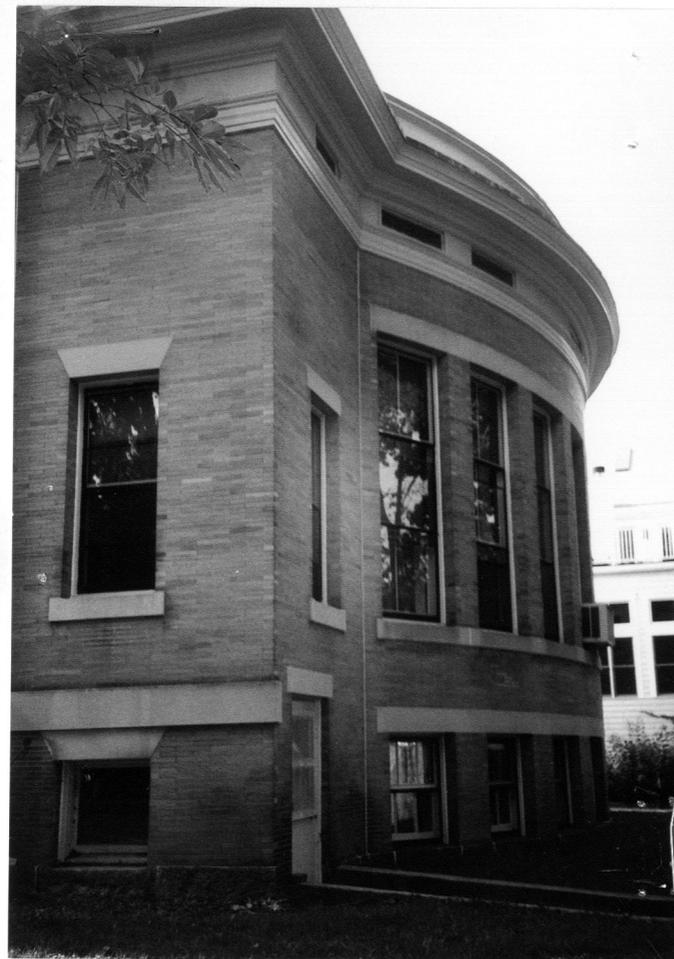
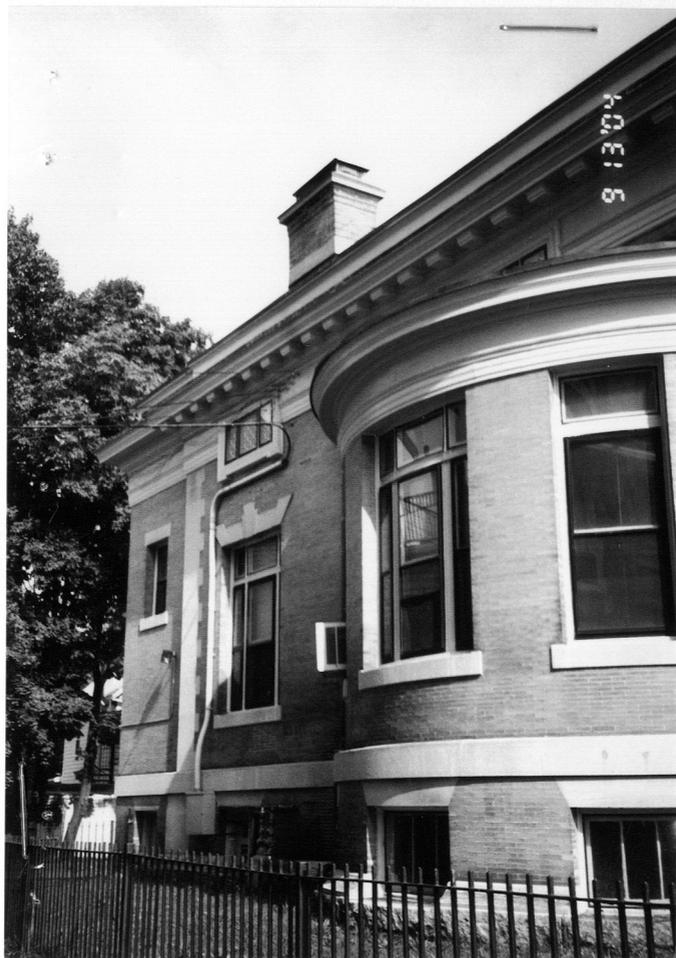
Davis	SMV.12765
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Major Alterations

2003-2004 With partial funding from the Massachusetts Historical Commission Preservation Projects Fund, the City of Somerville undertook major stabilization work on the exterior, including: masonry cleaning & repairs (repointing or repair of brick walls, rebuilding chimneys, and resetting of architectural elements), repair of downspouts, reinforcement of roof structure, window restoration on the upper floor and weather stripping, and repainting of windows and tympanum. Interior work included: repair and stabilization of walls and ceilings, repainting of two of the three first floor reading rooms and the stairwell consistent with historic colors, and wallpapering of a small reference room with period wallpaper. This project completes the exterior weatherproofing phase of the restoration of the West Somerville Library. Further interior restoration is required, as well as repair of flaking walls in the basement and on the second floor. Upgrades to the electrical and HVAC systems, and building accessibility are still needed.

As a component of the project, the City of Somerville authorized an investigation into the interior historic finishes by Preservation Consultants Sara Chase and Bill Finch. This investigation revealed the detailed stenciling done at the time of construction around the walls and ceilings of the reading rooms and stairwell. Also revealed were the original historic paint colors for the interior of the Library. Based upon these findings the City decided to incorporate some of these colors into the repainting of the main entry, two reading rooms and the stairwell. The detailed report in color entitled "Documentation of Original Decorative Painting in Selected Rooms and Vestibules," June 2004 will be kept on file at the office of the City's Historic Preservation Commission for restoration purposes when the City has sufficient funding to complete the historic color scheme.





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MHC  
#65

AREA

FORM NO.

West  
Somerville 127 65

ORM B - BUILDING

ASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
0 BOYLSTON STREET  
OSTON, MA 02116



Somerville  
Address 40 College Avenue

Historic Name West Somerville Branch Library

Present library

Original library

DESCRIPTION  
Date 1909

Architectural plans

Style Neoclassical

Architect McLean and Wright, Boston

Exterior Wall Fabric smooth-faced granite

Outbuildings none

Major Alterations (with dates) none

Condition Excellent

Moved no Date n/a

Acreage less than one acre

Setting The library is located on a major roadway leading to Davis Square in West Somerville

Commercial and institutional surrounds

Sketch Map: Draw map showing property's location in relation to nearest cross streets and/or geographical features. Indicate all buildings between inventoried property and nearest intersection(s). Indicate north

See Attached Assessor's Map

JTM REFERENCE Z E N  
19 - 325/270 - 4695/930

USGS QUADRANGLE Boston North

SCALE 1:25,000

Recorded by Betsy Friedberg, Preservation Planner

Organization Mass. Historical Commission

Date June 1986

**NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA STATEMENT (if applicable)**

The handsomely detailed West Somerville Branch Library retains integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, and feeling, as well as associations with Somerville's municipal building program and extreme growth at the turn of the century. Somerville's most intact example of the Neo-classical style, the building fulfills Criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places on the local level.

**ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE Describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within the community.**

This small branch library is one of Somerville's best conserved examples of the Neo-classical style. The fine entrance portico is composed of a triangular pediment carried by Ionic columns and broad pilasters. A modillioned cornice is carried around the building, and into the full raking cornice. Urns and acroteria finish the pediment. Built of smooth-cut granite, the building is 1 1/2 stories in height and three bays wide it is capped by a shallow hipped roof. Similar examples of the various expressions of the Neo-classical elsewhere in Somerville have been altered.

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE Explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community.**

The West Somerville Branch Library was opened in 1909, during the administration of librarian Samuel Walter Foss, noted poet and author of the "House By the Side of the Road." The West Somerville branch originated in a store in Davis Square, and served the growing population near Davis Square and the Old Powderhouse. The library construction was funded through a gift of \$25,000 from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation and through city appropriations.

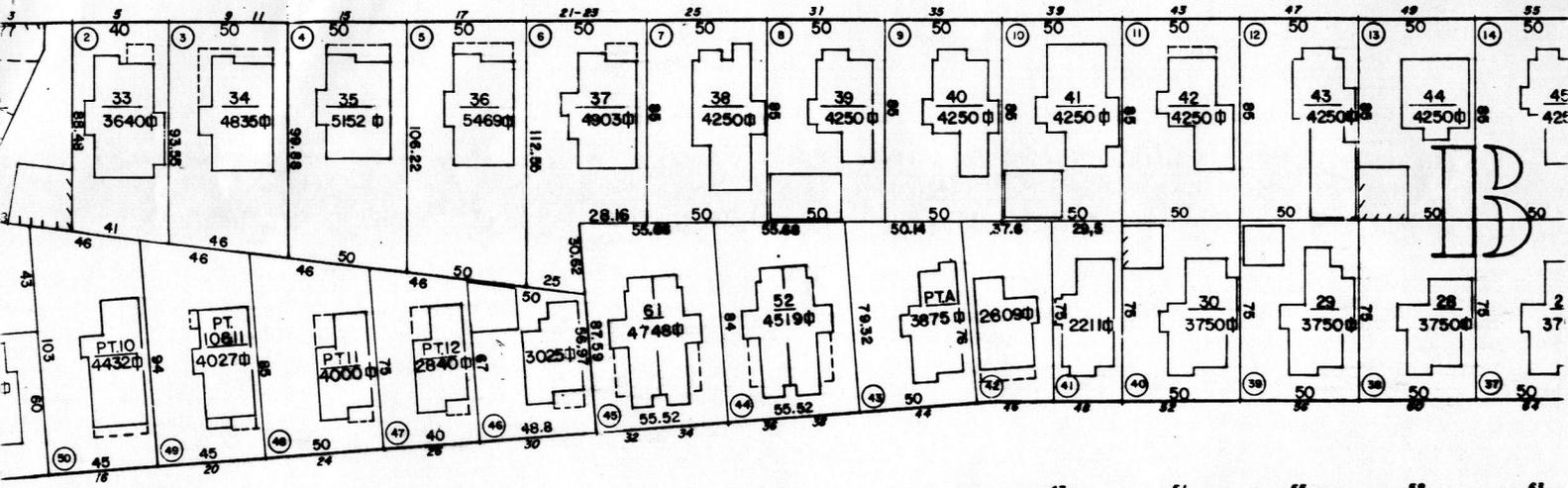
**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

Miscellaneous newspaper clippings, West Branch Library

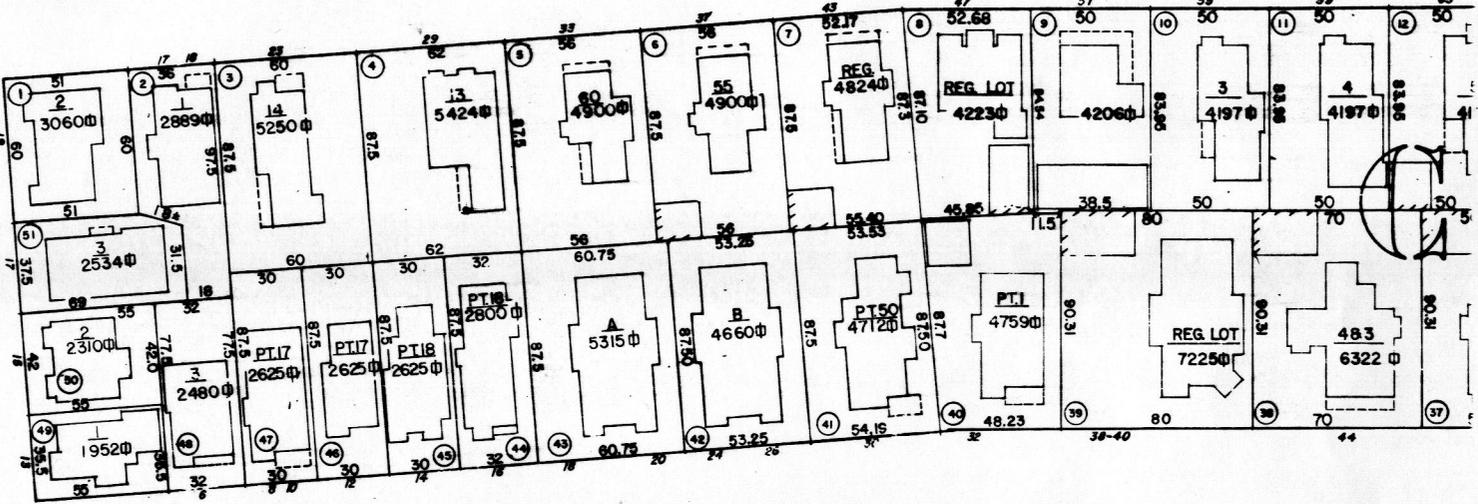
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SMV.65

RVING ST.



PARK AVE.

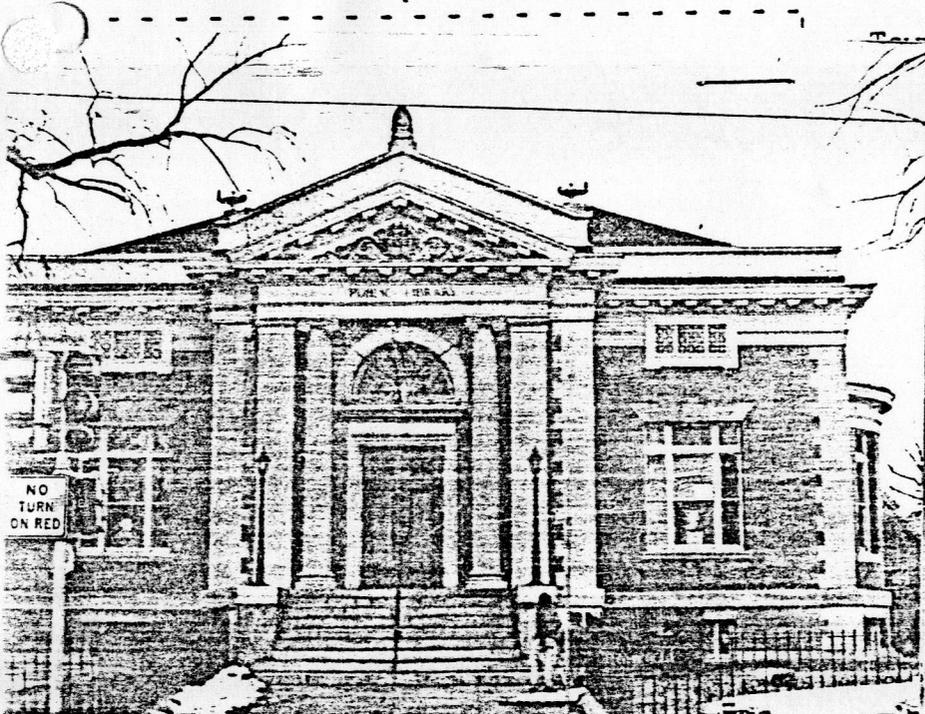


MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
294 Washington Street, Boston, MA 02108

update

Roll 2: 31

Somerville



Address 40 College Avenue

Historic Name West Branch Library

Original "

Present "

Ownership:  Private individual  
 Private organization "

Public City of Somerville

Original owner "

DESCRIPTION:

Date 1909

Source plans

Style Roman Revival

Architect McLean and Wright, Boston

Exterior wall fabric smooth-faced granite

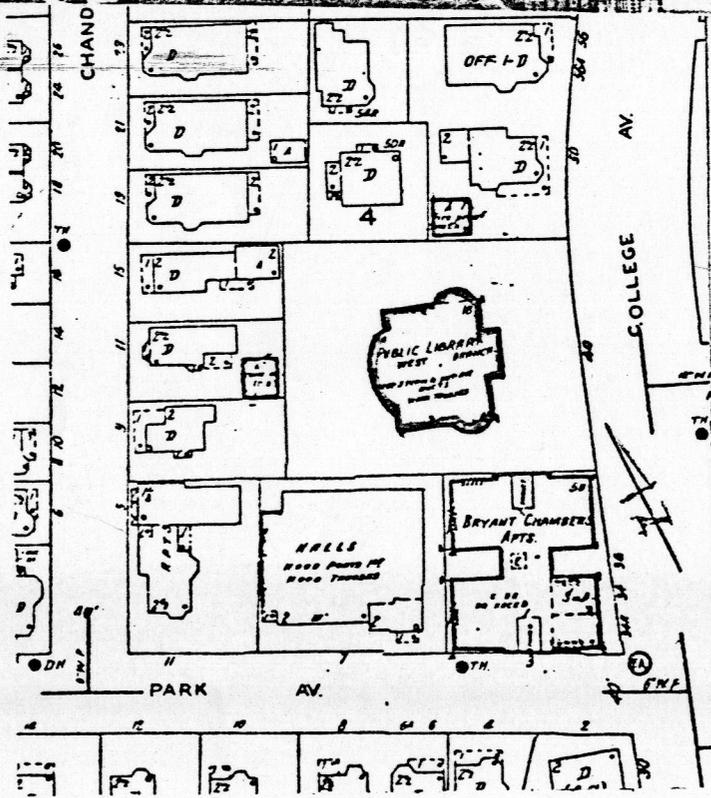
Outbuildings "

Major alterations (with dates) "

Moved " Date "

Approx. acreage less than one acre

Setting "



Recorded by Carole Zellie

Organization landscape Research

Date 12/80

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE (describe important architectural features and evaluate in terms of other buildings within community)

The West Branch Library is one of Somerville's best conserved examples of the Beaux Arts period. The fine entrance portico is composed of a triangular pediment carried by Ionic columns and broad pilasters. A modillioned cornice is carried around the building, and into the full raking cornice. Urns and acroteria finish the pediment. Similar examples of the various expressions of the Beaux Arts in Somerville have been altered.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE (explain the role owners played in local or state history and how the building relates to the development of the community)

The West Somerville Branch library was opened in 1909, during the administration of Samuel Walter Foss, noted poet and author of the "House By the Side of the Road". The West Somerville branch originated in a store in Davis Square, and served the growing population near Davis Square and the Old Powderhouse. The library construction was funded through a gift of \$25,000. from the Andrew Carneige foundation and through Town appropriation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Miscellaneous newspaper clippings, West Branch Library

FORM B - BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

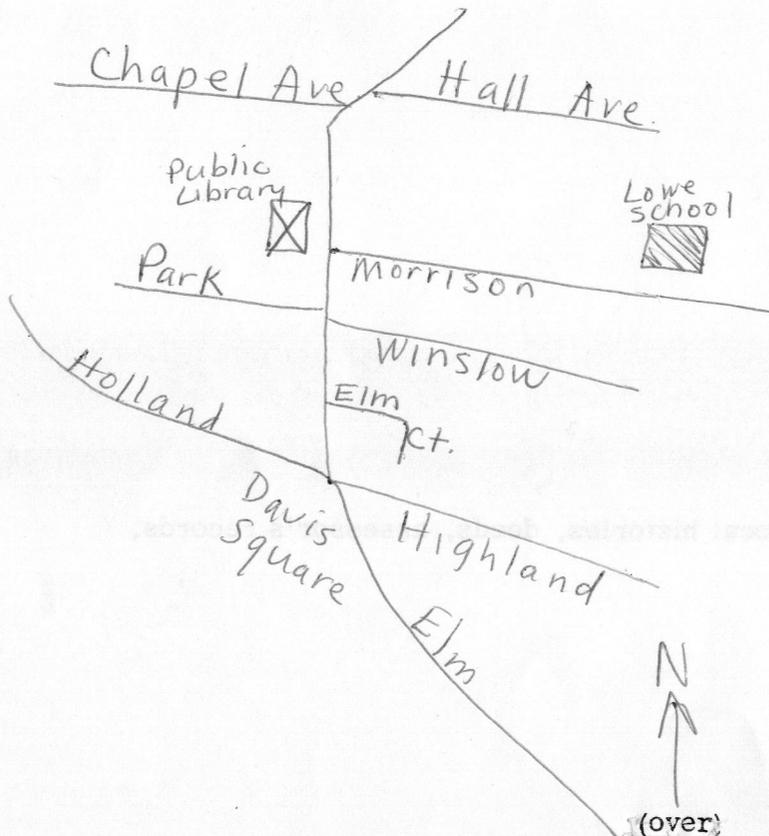
NRMAA  
9-16-89  
PR-  
6/17/10

In Area no.	Form no.
	65



own Somerville PR-  
 address College Ave. 3/15/89  
 name West Somerville Branch Library  
 present use "  
 present owner City of Somerville  
 description:  
 date 1906-1907  
 Source Librarian  
 style Colonial Revival

4. Map. Draw sketch of building location in relation to nearest cross streets and other buildings. Indicate north.



Architect \_\_\_\_\_  
 Exterior wall fabric yellow brick  
 Outbuildings (describe) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other features 1 1/2-story, hipped roof structure with pedimented central entrance pavilion with quoins.  
 Altered renovated Date 1975  
 Moved \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

5. Lot size:  
 One acre or less  Over one acre \_\_\_\_\_  
 Approximate frontage 45'  
 Approximate distance of building from street 20'

6. Recorded by Harriet White  
 Organization MAPC  
 Date 8/16/78

7. Original owner (if known) City of Somerville

Original use public library

Subsequent uses (if any) and dates \_\_\_\_\_

8. Themes (check as many as applicable)

- |                       |       |                            |          |                         |       |
|-----------------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------------|-------|
| Aboriginal            | _____ | Conservation               | _____    | Recreation              | _____ |
| Agricultural          | _____ | Education                  | <u>X</u> | Religion                | _____ |
| Architectural         | _____ | Exploration/<br>settlement | _____    | Science/<br>invention   | _____ |
| The Arts              | _____ | Industry                   | _____    | Social/<br>humanitarian | _____ |
| Commerce              | _____ | Military                   | _____    | Transportation          | _____ |
| Communication         | _____ | Political                  | _____    |                         |       |
| Community development | _____ |                            |          |                         |       |

9. Historical significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

10. Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Somerville	Form No: 65
Property Name: W. Somerville Branch Lib.	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

**Other features:**

Doric pilasters and fluted Ionic columns. Modillion cornice. 1½-story semi-circular bay on each side. Parapet on pediment with anthemion and 2 lamps symbolizing learning. Double doors with fanlight and tracery. 2 entresol windows with star pattern tracery.

Staple to Inventory form at bottom