

FORM B - BUILDING

NRDIS 8/2/1984

Assessor's number
4-30B

USGS Quad
Newburyport

Area(s)
L,U,K

Form Number
2203

Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125



Town Newburyport

Place (neighborhood or village)

Address 18-26 State Street

Historic Name Phenix Building

Uses: Present Commercial

Original Commercial/Public Hall

Date of Construction 1811

Source inscription on building

Style/Form Federal

Architect/Builder unknown

Exterior Material:

Foundation Granite

Wall/Trim Brick, Sandstone

Roof Asphalt Shingle

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures

none

Major Alterations (with dates) c.1970 - rehabilitation
of building

Condition good

Moved no yes Date

Acreage 2316 SF

Setting central business district, flanked by similar
brick blocks

Recorded by Lisa Mausolf

Organization Newburyport Historical Commission

Date (month/year) May 1999

BUILDING FORM (18-26 State Street)

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

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

The Phenix Building at 18-26 State Street is a three-story, Federal style building which was constructed c.1811. The building is capped by a gable roof with stepped parapet ends with integral chimneys. Brick dentils decorate the cornice. The first floor is divided into three storefronts all of which are capped by granite lintels. Each of the storefronts has a set of double wood-and-glass doors with two upper panes set above a lower panel, all of which is capped by a two-pane transom. The shop windows rest on recessed panel bulkheads set above brick. Inside the storefronts metal supporting columns are visible. Between the first and second storefronts there is a semicircular-arched passageway leading to the rear pedestrian mall. Historic photographs show that this was originally a six-panel door with arched wooden surround and lunette. An entrance to the upper floors is located in the northernmost bay and contains a glass-and-panel door with a clear rectangular transom.

The second story of the facade is punctuated by a series of ten 6/6 windows arranged in a 3 - 1 - 3 - 3 bay rhythm. On the third floor, the arrangement of windows is the same excepting an arched window near the center of the elevation which is utilized instead of two of the 6/6 windows. (In the early 20th century these windows contained 12/1 and 1/1 sash). All of the wooden windows are capped by splayed sandstone lintels with central keystones as well as sandstone sills. The arched window has a central 3 x 4-light window flanked by four light sidelights and capped by a semicircular transom, embellished by sandstone springblocks and a fluted keystone above a lintel of header bricks. Underneath the arched opening there is an oval marble panel set into a surround of header brick. The inscription on the stone is no longer clearly legible but originally read "Phenix Building, Erected December 1800, Burnt May 31, 1811, Rebuilt November 1811".

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Describe 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 Phenix Building stands on the site of an earlier building of the same name burned in the fire of 1811. The original building was erected by the Phenix Marine and Fire Insurance Company which was formed in 1809. The original building was reportedly designed by prominent architect Charles Bullfinch. Owing to heavy losses incurred due to the 1811 fire, the insurance company went out of business. In 1812 a dividend of seventy-five dollars was paid to the stockholders of the company for every one hundred dollars invested.

The public hall on the third floor has served numerous organizations over the years. It was a popular location for political meetings and was once known as Jefferson Hall. In 1825 St. Mark's and St. John's Masonic lodges leased the third floor (Phenix Hall) as well as two rooms below. The lodges spent over \$1000 finishing and decorating the space, which included the installation of two elegant pillars. The lodge quarters were dedicated on April 26, 1826 with the rooms opened to public inspection on July 21. St. Mark's lodge continued to occupy these rooms until 1862 when they moved to other quarters. St. Mark's lodge returned to Phenix Hall in 1898 and continued to meet here until about 1915. The First Universalist Church was established here in 1835. The Odd Fellows held their meetings in Phenix Hall between 1844 and 1850. The Club Lafayette was headquartered here in the early 20th century and L'Union St. Jean Baptiste was meeting here in 1920. Other organizations which used the hall in the 1930s included lodges of the Knights of Pythias.

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attached a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Town
NewburyportProperty Address
18-26 State St.
Area(s) Form No.Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

L,U,K | 2203

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued):

A "Reminiscences" article appearing in the Daily News in 1886 recalls many of the early shopkeepers in the Phenix building. The southernmost store was occupied early on by Jonathan Coolidge's dry goods store and about 1818 was used for a time as a government storehouse for forfeited goods before being used by Enoch Pierce as a crockery store. Among the first floor occupants were Nathaniel Foster who opened a clock and watchmaking store at 2 Phenix Building in 1818 and later moved to 26 State Street, still operating in the 1880s under the firm name of N. & T. Foster. Other occupants of the building in the first two decades included the Custom House, on the second story. Benjamin Stickney sold crockery and glass ware in the early days, succeeded by Henry Titcomb.

The lowest store of the Phenix Block was occupied at an early time by the bookstore and printing office of W. (Whittingham) & J. Gilman who also had the largest circulating library of the town. Isaac Knapp, the partner of Garrison, served as an apprentice with the Gilmans. B.E. Hale later had a printing office in the building and published the People's Advocate beginning in 1833 for only a year.

Moses Kimball had a dry goods business in the Phenix building c.1815 and after him was Jacob Morse. Dry goods merchant C.W. Davenport had a dry goods store at 22 State Street in 1851. In 1869 Charles Plumer's dry goods store was located at 18 State Street while H.G. Johnson Jr. had a fancy goods store at 22 State Street. Conley & McManus, druggists, were at 18 State Street about 1890.

In the mid 20th century, first floor tenants include the Cooperative Stores, and later Cohen's Meat Market at 18 State Street. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the building was nearly completely vacant and the building was scheduled to be demolished as part of Urban Renewal. Emergency repairs were made to the building in 1971 and soon thereafter the building was redeveloped by the Restoration Design Group of Portsmouth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

- Bartlett, Horace. "History of St. John's Lodge AF & AM", Daily News, July 18, 1916.
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Maps

- Atlas of Essex County, Massachusetts*. Philadelphia: D.B. Beers & Co., 1872.
Atlas of Essex County, Massachusetts. Boston: George H. Walker, 1884.
 Beck & Paul. *City of Newburyport*. Framingham, Mass.: Bigelow and Hazen, 1880.
Plan of Newburyport. Philadelphia: H. McIntyre, 1851.
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INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

Massachusetts Historical Commission
Massachusetts Archives Building
220 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, Massachusetts 02125

Town
Newburyport

Property Address
28-34 State Street
Area(s) Form No.

L.U	2204
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Source: Photographic Collection, Newburyport Public Library.