

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Converse Memorial Library

and or common Malden Public Library

2. Location

street & number 36 Salem Street

 not for publication

city, town Malden

 vicinity of

state Massachusetts

code 025

county Middlesex

code

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<u> </u> district	<u> </u> public	<u> X </u> occupied	<u> X </u> museum
<u> X </u> building(s)	<u> X </u> private	<u> </u> unoccupied	<u> </u> park
<u> </u> structure	<u> </u> both	<u> </u> work in progress	<u> X </u> educational
<u> </u> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<u> </u> entertainment
<u> </u> object	<u> </u> in process	<u> </u> yes: restricted	<u> </u> government
	<u> </u> being considered	<u> X </u> yes: unrestricted	<u> </u> industrial
		<u> </u> no	<u> </u> military
			<u> </u> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Trustees of Malden Public Library

street & number 36 Salem Street

city, town Malden

 vicinity of

state Massachusetts

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Middlesex County Registry of Deeds

street & number 40 Thorndike Street

city, town Cambridge

state Massachusetts

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title National Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? X yes no

date September 5, 1985

 X federal state county local

depository for survey records National Park Service

city, town Washington

state DC

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The following building description is taken from the National Register of Historic Places nomination written by Jeff Cronin of the Malclen Historic Commission:

The Converse Memorial Building is the public library of the city of Malden. Located in Malden Centre near Converse Square, the building is on Salem Street, at the corner of Park Street, near a densely settled residential area. Immediately to the west is the First Baptist Church (H.S. McKay, 1891), a Richardsonian Romanesque building designed to complement the library.

A masonry building, oriented toward the south, the library stands on a slightly elevated site behind an open lawn. The brownstone curb wall, surmounted by a low cast iron railing, borders the lot along Salem and Park Streets.

With its three additions, the present arrangement of the building is a modified T-form. The original 1885 library is rectangular in plan. It consists of two wings, which form an L-shape, connected by an open courtyard. The principal wing extending 121' in length, is parallel to Salem Street. The projecting side wing, along Park Street, extends 93' in length.

The 1896 additions (designed by Shepley, Rutan and Colledge) are: a gabled rear wing, measuring 64' x 33', which continues the original design of the building along Park Street; and, a flat-roofed book stack area with vertical window bays, measuring 40' x 38', attached to the rear wall of the main wing. An octagonal-shaped art gallery (designed by Newhall and Blevins) was constructed in 1916 onto the rear of the building the entrance to the gallery is a gabled vestibule executed in brownstone to harmonize with the design of the original structure. The gallery has a pyramidal roof covered with slate tiles and a large central skylight.

The main building, set on a granite foundation and a high watertable, has masonry-bearing walls. It is constructed of rockfaced red sandstone extracted from the Kibbe quarry in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. The masonry is random-coursed with an ashlar finish, and the colored mortar originally had a beaded joint.

The principal wings of the building have gabled ends which rise 41' above grade and terminate with brownstone finials at the ridge line. The broad planes of the roof are clad with grey slate tiles and a copper flashing ridge. An octagonal stair turret on the front elevation centers the composition and stands at the junction of the two original wings. The tower is 55' in height and has arched muntined windows trimmed with elaborately carved drip moldings, and a copper-clad roof topped by an ornamental crocket. Two smaller towers, with conical roofs, gargoyles, and slightly battered walls, stand at the southwest and northeast corners of the building.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400-1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500-1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/
___ 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> art	___ engineering	___ music	___ humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
___ 1900-	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation
		___ invention		___ other (specify)

Specific dates 1885, 1916 **Builder/Architect** H. H. Richardson, Architect
Norcross Brothers, Builders

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Converse Memorial Library in Malden is the last of Richardson's libraries; it was begun in 1883. The series of library buildings are generally regarded to be among the architects greatest works, expressing power of design. As he matured, his work showed progressively more simplification and coherence. Each library became more compact than the previous one, all using the heavy archway and continuous bands of windows which are the hallmarks of his "Romanesque" style. America now had an indigenous architectural style with Richardson's "cultural community center" libraries and he became one of this country's first internationally known practitioners.

The early history of the Converse Memorial is full of Victorian melodrama. The Library was a gift to the City of Malden from a wealthy industrialist who wished to build a memorial to a seventeen-year-old son tragically murdered in December 1863. Frank Eugene Converse was the lone teller on duty at his father's bank on a snowy day when the robbery occurred; two shots were fired and the boy fell. The newspapers exploited the sensationalism of the crime and the town postmaster, Edward Green, was apprehended, tried, and convicted of the murder. Subsequently, legions of Boston reformers tried to save Green from hanging and, as a result, the "Malden murder" was the most talked about crime in Massachusetts in the 19th century:

The benefactor of Malden and father of the slain boy was Elisha Slade Converse who had started in business as a tailor. He later began to manufacture rubber shoes and rubber-soled cloth shoes when the idea of such shoes was experimental and considered somewhat unsound from a business point of view. Mr. Converse founded the great Boston Rubber Shoe Company in Malden, for years one of the foremost rubber shoe companies in the world. From this business he became a multi-millionaire; he was also involved in real estate, he was one of the first investors in Alexander Graham Bell's telephone stock, he organized and became president of the First National Bank of Malden. It was at this bank that his son was working on that fateful December day.

For years after their son's murder, Elisha and Mary Converse had considered ways of honoring the memory of their son but it was not until 1883 that they found what they considered a perfect and lasting memorial--the Converse Memorial Building for the public library. The movement for a public library had begun as early as 1871 but it was not until 1876 that the first sum of money, \$119.20, was raised. In 1877 the town voted to establish the Malden Public Library but two more years were to pass before there were actually books, organization, and quarters -- a room in the Town Hall. The library was officially opened to the public on February 14, 1879. By 1882 the library had outgrown its quarters and The Trustees were searching for

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approx. 1 acre

Quadrangle name Boston North

Quadrangle scale 1:25,000

UTM References

A

1	9	3	3	0	0	0	0	4	6	9	9	0	9	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

B

Zone		Easting						Northing						

C

Zone		Easting						Northing						

D

Zone		Easting						Northing						

E

Zone		Easting						Northing						

F

Zone		Easting						Northing						

G

Zone		Easting						Northing						

H

Zone		Easting						Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary encompasses only the Converse Memorial Library and its additions (1896-1915) and is the same as that shown of lot 027 on sheet No. 75 of the town plan. The boundary is shown in blue on the accompanying copy of a section of the town plan.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Pitts, Historian

organization National Park Service, History Division date _____

street & number 1100 L Street, NW telephone (202)343-8166

city or town Washington state DC 20013-7127

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature _____

title _____ date _____

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

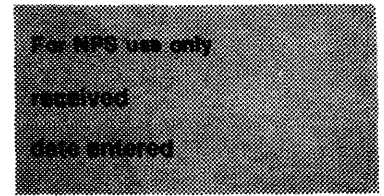
Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

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Beneath the sloping roof of the projecting wing, on the front elevation, is a low arcaded loggia, known as the Memorial Porch. The loggia, which measures 36' x 10' serves as the principal entrance and opens onto a terrace. A series of clustered columns and giant piers support the round arches of the porch. The cushioned capitals of these columns exhibit richly carved interlace patterns of Byzantine derivation. A balustrade and continuous stone bench border the south end of the loggia. The large commemorative tablet, with rinceau and incised lettering, is imbedded into the west wall of the porch.

The enriched decorative treatment of the masonry distinguishes the south gable end on the front elevation. Tessellated courses of brownstone are divided by stringcourses of serpentine stone (now replaced with tinted concrete). Three paterae executed in green tesseræ are set within a centered blind arch. The raking gable terminates (on the east end) in a carved bestiary.

The fenestration is a series of deeply recessed transomed windows. On the side elevations, the windows are separated by stone mullions; the tripartite windows in the gable ends have simple label moldings. The east wall has three gabled wall dormers (with arched windows), and the west gable features an arched two-story muntined window. On the front elevation, the windows, on the second story, are arranged in long horizontal banks divided by alternating mullions of engaged columns and piers with carved capitals; the four bays adjacent to the central tower are two stories in height. The original wood-constructed windows were designed in a variety of window patterns (mostly four-over-four and one-over-one). Replacement window assemblies, framed in metal with an anodized finish and similar in detailing to the original, were recently installed throughout the building.

The plain brownstone walls to the courtyard are slightly battered and align with the planar walls of the west and south ends. Inside the walls is a continuous sill for seating. The courtyard originally had bluestone paving and boxwood hedgerow. A brick walkway from the sidewalk leads into a terrace paved with large brownstone slabs. Ornate wrought iron gates and two light standards (with glass globes) frame the entryway. The ironwork, installed in 1911 as a memorial gift to Lillie A. B. Hill, was designed by L. S. Ipsen, a local artist.

The interior of the building is organized by a simple plan of spacious rooms connected by arched openings. The Main Hall is a monumental room with an open-timbered, barrel-vaulted ceiling, thirty feet in height. A large window in the west wall illuminates the hall. Richly decorated tiered alcoves, with bookshelves and a continuous second floor gallery, abut the interior walls. Winding stairs in the corners lead to the gallery. Set into an alcove off the Main Hall is a massive fireplace framed by dark red bricks and an exuberantly detailed chimney breast (consisting of a

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symmetrical arrangement in wood of raised bosses, clustered columns, a large fielded panel, and a frieze of stylized wave molding). Two inglenook seats flank the fireplace. Overlooking the reference room (the original art gallery) is a decorative balcony with leaded glass doors. The ceiling in the room is coffered with finished oak beams and illuminated by skylights.

The interior finishes in the library exhibit a high level of craftsmanship and originality of design. The wooden surfaces are enriched with moldings and carvings that remain in an excellent state of preservation. As in the Richardson-designed libraries at Quincy and North Easton, the interior woodwork consists of quartered white oak treated with a highly polished finish. The slats and transverse ribbing of the vaulted ceiling, the wainscotting, the batten doors, and the paneling of the chimney surround are all of golden oak.

An extensive collection of furnishings, designed by H. H. Richardson for the building, remains in use in the Trustees Room and in the Ryder Art Gallery. These furnishings are mostly wooden armchairs with turned spindles and carved free-flowing reliefs with foliage. Of particular interest is a double settee with gently curved and intersecting back rests and turned spindles. The design of the furniture exhibits both Windsor and Art Nouveau influences. All of the original furnishings, and those currently in general use, are of white oak.

In its early years, the interior space of the library was more open than its present crowded arrangement. Great velvet curtains separated the rooms, and a delivery desk, enclosed by spindled screens, stood within the Main Hall. The floors were carpeted, and the walls were finished with sanded paint in a variety of rich "Pompeian" colors (yellow, red, ochre, and green). The lighting fixtures on the interior were hammered brass sconces with glass globes and coiled brackets. The building presently has industrial carpeting and off-white walls. The original lighting fixtures were electrified in 1887, and fluorescent lighting was installed in 1956.

The interior of the 1896 book stack wing has four levels of cast iron book shelves and floors of translucent industrial glass. The 1915 gallery is an octagonal room with oak wainscotting and an open glass ceiling illuminated by a central skylight.

Ivy from Maldon, Essex in England was planted around the building in 1913 and removed recently for repointing of the masonry. A wooden carriage shed on the rear lot was removed about 1920. The building is generally in good condition, and the interior finishes are in an excellent state of preservation. The brownstone is in comparatively stable condition with the exception of deteriorated balusters on the Memorial Porch and spalled sections of the large paving slabs at the entrance, which has recently been repaired.¹

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additional space, possibly in the Town Hall. In the same year Malden became a city and Elisha Converse was elected its first Mayor and thus became an ex-officio member of the library's Board of Trustees. He and his wife decided to give to the city, in trust, the Converse Memorial Building to house the library and a municipal art gallery, and no expense was spared in its construction....

He felt that the library, as a memorial, "will benefit a larger number of our citizens" than any other, Elisha and Mary Converse donated many paintings and sculptures to form the nucleus of the art collection and they both left generous endowments for the maintenance of the building and for the purchase of art.

Many fine paintings have been purchased since 1885. One of them, Winslow Homer's "Whittling," won international renown of the sort most museums would rather avoid when it was stolen and recovered in 1975. In that same year the Library's "La Baratteuse" by Millet was part of a major retrospective exhibition of the artist's work at the Louvre and this same painting was part of a major exhibition in Japan in 1980. J. M. W. Turner's "Seascape With Squall Coming Up" has been lent for many exhibitions, the latest of which at the Dixon Gallery and Gardens in Memphis, Tennessee in 1979.

Other artists represented in the Library's collection include Bonington, Inness, Copley, Guardi, Andre, Watts, and local artists George Loring Brown, Albion H. Bicknell, and J. Morvillier. In 1979, through the auspices of the Fogg Museum at Harvard, the Library received a collection of 18th century English engravings. This library and museum, because of the Richardson building and Richardson designed and Davenport manufactured furniture as well as the small but fine art gallery have attracted art and architecture students and lovers from all over the world.²

The Converse family planned a memorial in the aftermath of the crime that was to be comprised of two structures on adjacent lots; the First Baptist Church and a new public library, both to be designed by Henry Hobson Richardson.

Although the church was not built until seven years later by another architect, the new library and art gallery was commissioned in 1883. The design was still being considered in January 1884 when Richardson and Frederick Law Olmsted visited the site. Orlando Whitney Norcross, a builder and engineer, was responsible for the construction. (He supplied the stone and was consulted about other materials and cost on Richardson designs for over a decade). Norcross, with his brother, James Atkinson Norcross became one of the most prosperous building firms well into the twentieth century. Construction began in the Spring of 1884 and the building was dedicated October 1, 1885. There have been

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two additions: one in 1896 which included stacks, a reading room, and a reference room. The second, built in 1914 contained a children's library on the lower level and a new art gallery above to contain an additional number of paintings accrued with the original Converse gift.

One of the great treasures of the Converse Library is the original Richardson-designed furniture. Richard Randall in catalogue notes from an exhibition of the architect's furniture designs states that:

Henry Hobson Richardson created furniture in the spirit of American colonial revival, the chairs being adapted from the comb back windsor of the eighteenth century and tables without any gothic features. Converse library chairs with pronounced bell turnings near the seat and spindle backs and arms are very familiar in Richardson sketches now in the Houghton Library, Harvard University. The rectangular tables with an unusual arrangement of six legs, joined by stretchers match other sketches very closely. Of particular interest is the settee for the art gallery which is a heavy adaptation of a windsor bench. Richardson's furniture can be viewed as pieces representing his design vocabulary. These tables and chairs illustrate the imagination of a creative architect. All of the original tables and chairs were manufactured by the Albert H. Davenport Company, a Boston furniture company whose owner was a prominent Malden man.³

Malden's collection of Davenport chairs and tables designed by Richardson is the best collection extant.

Richardson died six months after the library was dedicated but a portrait-print of him hangs on a wall near the circulation desk. It seems appropriate when one remembers the famous comment about Richardson: "My God, how he looks like his own buildings!" Not only were his buildings symbols of a burgeoning industrial nation but the architect himself was a triumph of capitalism. He managed a large firm with "teams" assigned to specific commissions. He also employed or collaborated with the best artists of the time: Augustus Saint-Gaudens, John La Farge, Frederick Law Olmsted, and John Evans, an ornamental carver.

Richardson also enjoyed important social status as an artist and moved in circles of power and wealth and was accepted as an equal. It is in the person and in the work of H. H. Richardson that American architecture becomes internationally important.

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Footnotes

¹National Register of Historic Places. Converse Memorial Library, Malden, Massachusetts, 1977. Massachusetts Historical Commission.

²Malden Public Library. One hundredth Anniversary of the Malden Public Library. 1879-1979. Published by the Malden Historical Society. pp. 3-4.

³Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The Furniture of H. H. Richardson. Exhibition Catalogue. January 1962. p. 28.

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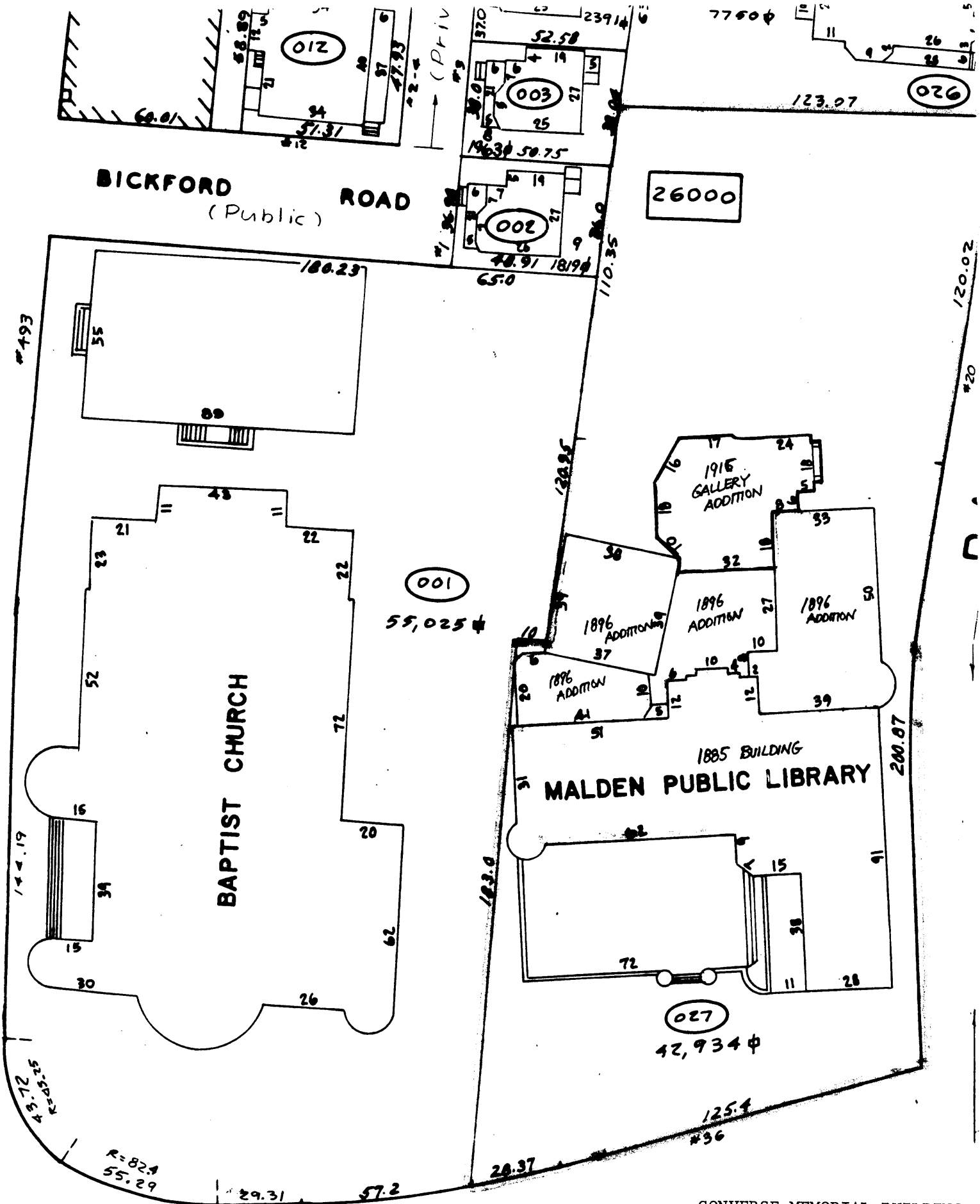
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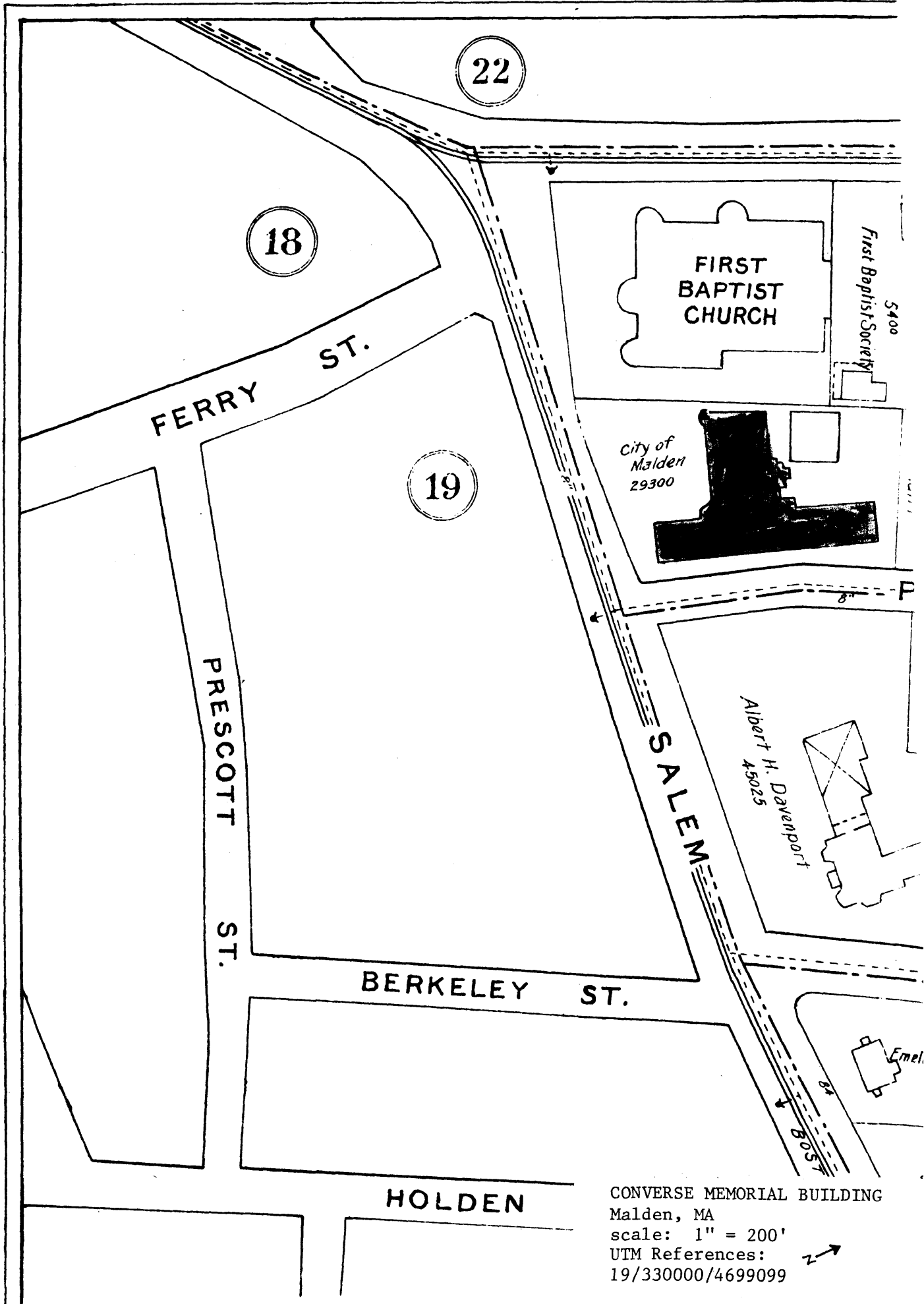
Van Rensselaer, Marianna Griswold. Henry Hobson Richardson and His Works. Boston: 1888; rev. ed. New York: Dover Press, 1969.

(Public)



(SHEET NO. 75)

CONVERSE MEMORIAL BUILDING
 Malden, MA
 scale: 1" = 300'
 UTM References:
 19/330000/4699099
 Malden Assessors Map



22

18

19

FERRY ST.

PRESCOTT ST.

BERKELEY ST.

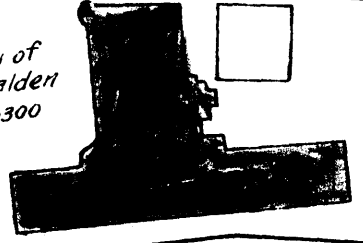
HOLDEN

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

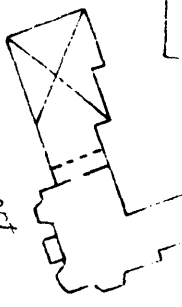
First Baptist Society

5400

City of Malden 29300



Albert H. Davenport 45025

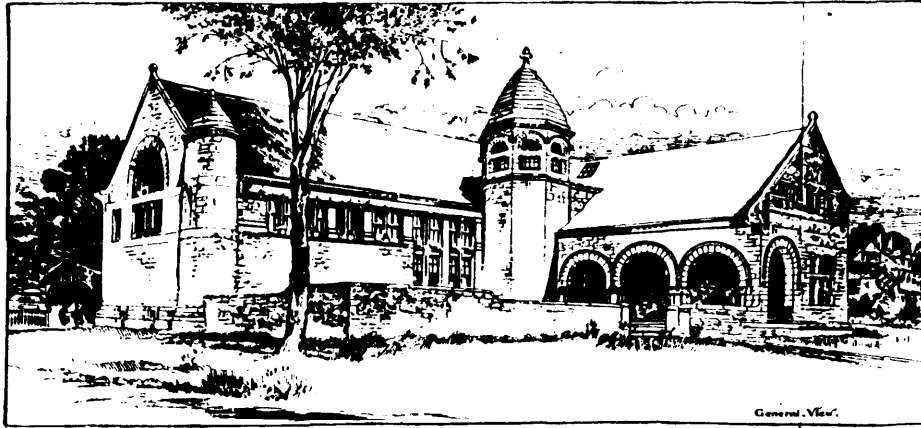


BOST

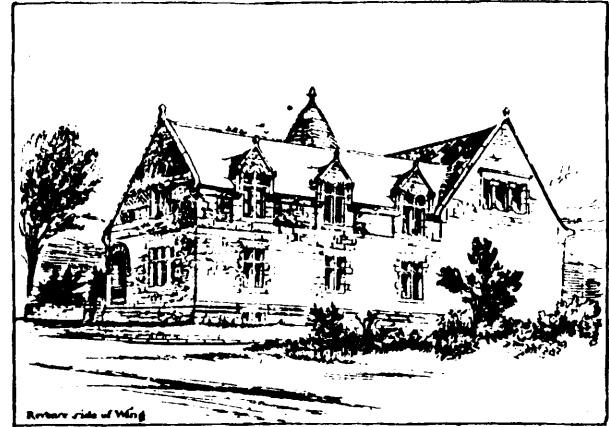
Emel

CONVERSE MEMORIAL BUILDING
 Malden, MA
 scale: 1" = 200'
 UTM References:
 19/330000/4699099





General View.

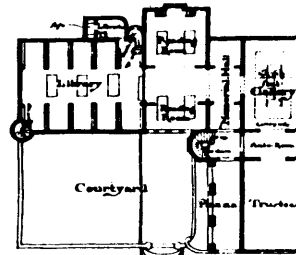
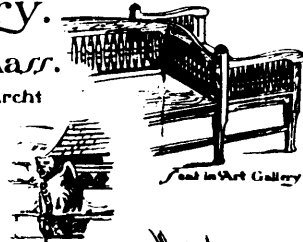
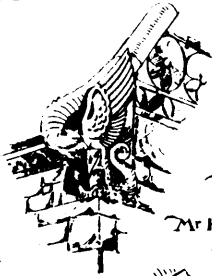


Reverse side of Wing

The Converse Memorial Library.

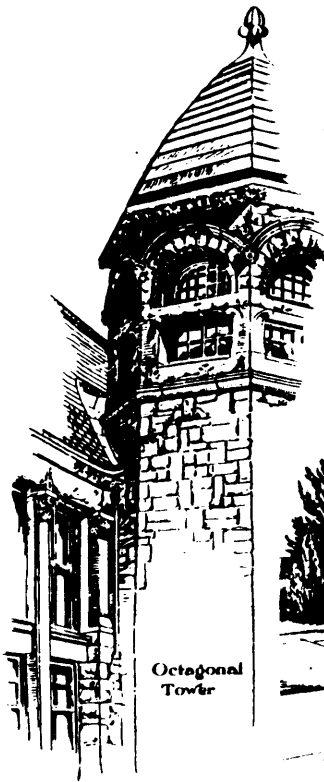
Malden, Mass.

By H.H. Richardson, Archt.
Brookline, Mass.

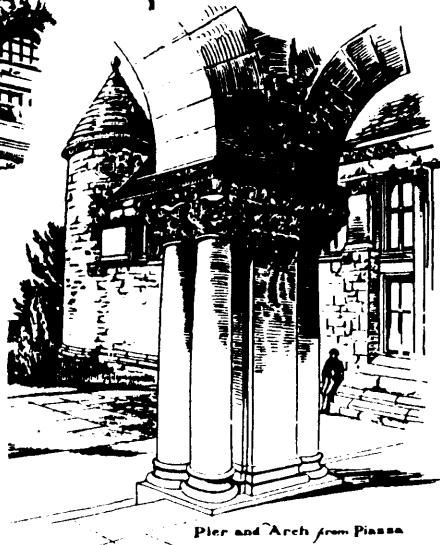


Sketch Plan

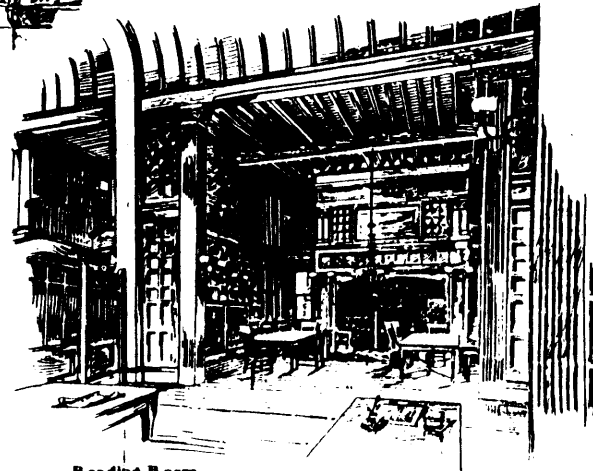
Approximate Scale of Feet



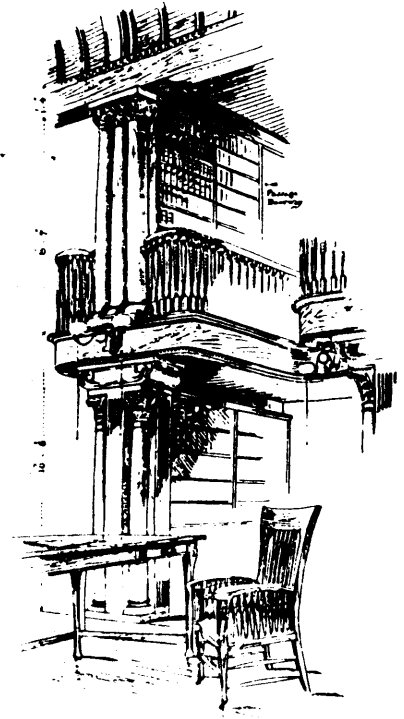
Octagonal Tower



Pier and Arch from Piazza



Reading Room.



Alcove with Book-Shelves in Library

Sketches by E. Eldon Deane.