

Central School/ 1910 Building/ Town Offices

West Newbury's decision in 1909 to build a new Central School—the most consequential municipal building since [Town Hall's](#) construction in 1842—was a testament to civic pride and investment in the future. It was also, like many school building projects, a reluctant acknowledgement that deplorable existing conditions made action unavoidable. Inevitably, intervening events made the building an imperfect solution to the Town's educational needs, though always a commanding structure adaptable to new purposes.

In the early 1900s the state began urging consideration of lighting, heating, plumbing/hygiene, and ventilation in schools. Although the high school had been remodeled, the grammar school and one-room schoolhouses for elementary students met few or none of these criteria. The Town's [1903 Annual Report](#) conceded “universally poor” conditions, yet offered that the windows and doors were “not so tightly fitted as to prevent fresh air from coming in.”

By [1909](#), the school superintendent reported that the grammar school was “utterly unfit for use and should be discarded,” while the one-room schools were not much better. He concluded, “To properly provide for its pupils the town needs a new modern building, centrally located, with ample grounds, and having room enough not only for the present needs but also to provide for a probable increase in the number of pupils.” A prominent committee convened; in short order, an [impressive Central School was designed](#) by architects [Ashton & Huntress](#) and put out to bid.

When opened to grades 1-9 on September 4, 1910, the [Central School](#) contained four large rooms on each floor, and separate boys' and girls' entrances. From the outset, not all was ideal. Getting children to and from a central school, for instance, was not adequately addressed. In 1911, the omission of transportation costs in the budget had to be rectified at the [Fall Town Meeting](#), and, the [“existing condition of back roads”](#) made it infeasible to close schoolhouse #9 (at the southwest corner of [Turkey Hill Road and what is now Pikes Bridge trail](#)) until 1930.

Ensuing years saw improvements and repairs—and disaster. Electric wiring was introduced and the heating system upgraded in [1915](#); first floor ceilings, which threatened to fall, were repaired in [1921](#). In

1930, after the high school was finally condemned, the [building was remodeled](#) so that grades 1-6 were on the first floor, grades 7-12 on the second.

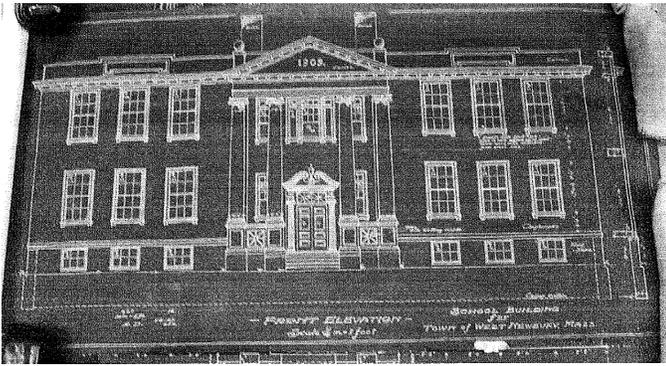
At 7:10 p.m. on [November 15, 1938](#), neighbors heard an explosion. In the west side of the Central School's basement, an arsonist (never identified) used kerosine to set a fire that gutted the building and sent the Town scrambling to find [makeshift classrooms](#) for 200 students. The remodeled building reopened in May, 1939 with improved heating, lighting, ventilation, fire protection, and other amenities.

Overcrowding, first an issue in [1915](#), waxed and waned with the Town's population until 1951, when it became so serious that the high school students were sent to Newburyport—and then, in 1958, to the new Pentucket High School. In 1965, when the Central School again became too crowded, [a one-story six-room addition, as well as a gym/cafeteria \(now the Annex\) was built at the back](#). After the Town bought the Pipestave complex, grades 3-6 moved to the Page School in 1974. Municipal services began using the building—notably the police in the basement between 1982-1997.

The Central School [ceased being a school building in 1985](#), when the remaining grades joined the others at Page School. The Annex was converted to a community center, and in 1992, the classrooms at the back became [elderly housing](#). Although remodeled in [1997](#) to better accommodate the senior center and Town offices (and at that time renamed the 1910 Building), the former school building retains its original chalk boards and classroom clocks.

The old school building at 381 Main Street remains a commanding presence in Town. According to a [1956](#) history of the Central School, “From the classrooms and the lawn below, one views to the west a panorama of unmatched beauty, the ... Merrimack and in the farther distance the highlands of old New Hampshire. At the rear, guarded by Archelaus, one sees the rising farmlands of West Newbury.... This beautiful school, built by Albert W. Wales on a well chosen site, has seen many changes.... With all these changes, the importance of improved educational opportunity in this rapidly changing world is universally accepted.”

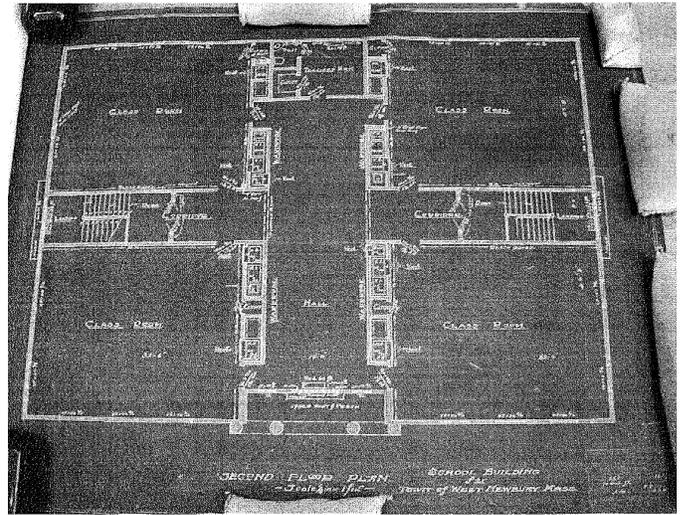
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1909 plans: front elevation

Source of images above, at right, and below:

[Historic Sites Survey of the Central School](#)



1909 plans: second floor



typical office - note the original blackboards

Source below: 11/1983 Haverhill Gazette clipping, Town Offices basement collection

Two Additions to West Newbury's Public Buildings

WEST NEWBURY'S NEW SCHOOL BUILDING.
Bids for its construction will soon be opened.

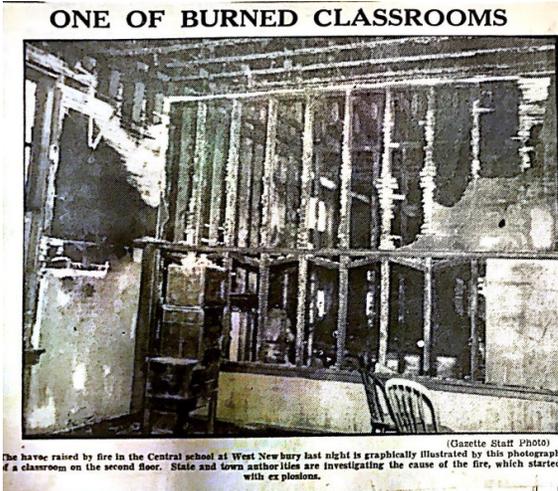
THE NEW SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, WEST NEWBURY.
Plans for the structure have just been accepted by committee.

WEST NEWBURY'S NEW SCHOOL BUILDING.
West Newbury, Oct. 6.—The bids for building the new eight-room schoolhouse will be opened by the committee on Friday evening of this week and the contract awarded. The plans were drawn by Ashton & Hennessey, architects, of Lawrence and were submitted to the committee in competition with six other ones.

THE SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.
West Newbury, Oct. 6.—The committee on the new church for the Second parish, after looking over the plans which have been drawn by Ashton & Hennessey of Lawrence, voted to submit them to the contractors whom the committee selected and the bids are called for in one week.

The plans call for a wooden building. In the basement there will be a parlor, a kitchen and toilet rooms. The church will be heated with two furnaces, one for the main church and a smaller one for the Sunday school room. The pews will be cedar and the floors will be of hard wood.

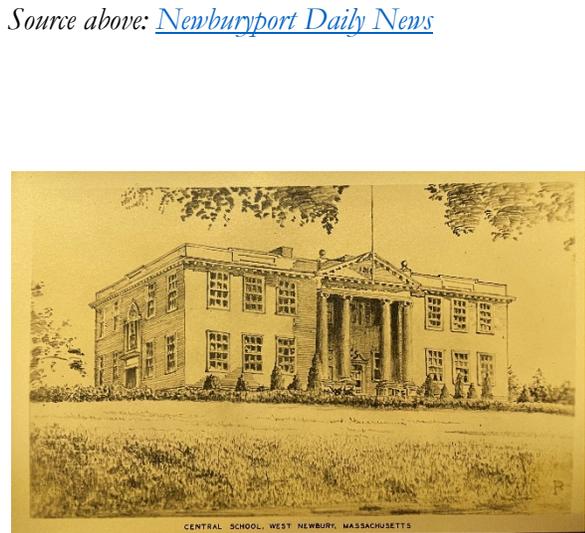
The church will be completed about Christmas time of the present year and it will take the place of the large church which was burned April 24



(Gazette Staff Photo) The havoc raised by fire in the Central school at West Newbury last night is graphically illustrated by this photograph of a classroom on the second floor. State and town authorities are investigating the cause of the fire, which started with explosions.



(Gazette Staff Photo) A camera shot of the foot of the stairway in the west end of the Central school at West Newbury after fire had swept the interior of that end of the building last night, leaving the town's entire school population of 200 children temporarily without accommodations.



Source above: Postcard, collection of Dot Cavanaugh