

# M. Ida Converse Building

## 15 Ferry Street

*Malden, Mass.*



Preliminary Conditions Review  
In Support of  
Potential Building Move

April 2021



BUILDING CONSERVATION ASSOCIATES INC

# M. Ida Converse Building

## 15 Ferry Street

*Malden, Mass.*

**Prepared For**

Khalsa Design, Inc.

17 Ivaloo Street

Suite 400

Somerville, MA 02143

**Prepared By**

Building Conservation Associates, Inc.

10 Langley Road, Suite 202

Newton Centre, MA 02459

**BCA Team**

Colleen Chapin

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## **INTRODUCTION**

On March 10, 2021, Building Conservation Associates, Inc. (BCA) surveyed the general conditions of the building at 15 Ferry Street, Malden, Massachusetts. The conditions of the building materials were recorded with digital photographs.

As part of a mitigation agreement with the City of Malden and the Malden Historical Commission, the owner of the property intends to move the building one parcel to the south and donate the building to the City for its future use. The purpose of this assessment was to identify conditions that might adversely affect a successful move and provide guidance on appropriate repair treatments.

## **BUILDING DESCRIPTION AND BRIEF HISTORY**

Built in the Colonial Revival style, the building at 15 Ferry Street is three bays wide by two bays deep. The building is wood framed and clad with buff colored brick and a limestone clad exposed foundation. The water table, belt course, windowsills, and keystones at the arched windows are also limestone. The hip roof is clad with asphalt shingles. At the rear slope the roof is punctured by a skylight, vent stack, and ridge vents. Brick chimneys are symmetrically located at the north and south eaves. Decorative wood rafter tails are exposed under the deeply projecting cornice. The front entrance features a single door with transom flanked by side lites and surrounded by a classically inspired pedimented portico. The portico is supported by decorative iron supports that have replaced the original wood columns at this location. At the rear of the building, a small, shed-roof addition incorporates an original rear entrance. A metal bulkhead for basement access is adjacent to this addition.

15 Ferry Street was constructed in 1906 to serve as the Malden Industrial Aid Association by Mary Ida Converse, a prominent local philanthropist. The building nominally faces east, running parallel with Ferry Street. The site is situated in a prominent commercial location in Malden, across the street from the Malden High School. The Romanesque Malden Baptist Church and Converse Library are located across the intersection of Ferry and Salem Streets with direct line of sight from 15 Ferry Street.

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## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The building at 15 Ferry Street appears to be in good condition with a high degree of integrity of original character defining features on the exterior and interior.

It is anticipated that moving the building will require removal of the front entrance portico, the rear shed addition and the limestone foundation elements. Full restoration of the portico and foundation elements is anticipated following a successful move. Replicating the original wood columns at the portico is recommended. The rear shed addition is not original to the building but may offer an important storage area not otherwise available. If this addition is restored or rebuilt, it should not be enlarged beyond its existing footprint and height.

Given the brick and limestone exterior and the level of effort anticipated to move the building off the existing foundation, it is expected that some damage to the masonry may occur during the move. Once the building has been relocated, ensuring that all observed damaged is corrected and any removal or damage of original building fabric be restored will constitute key success criteria for the continued use of the building by the City of Malden.

Deferred maintenance at the north chimney has led to large cracks which will require extra attention and stabilization prior to the building move. Repairs to this crack are recommended after the successful move. Post-relocation treatments are also recommended to address deferred maintenance with respect to the masonry. These treatments include repointing of the brick and limestone and cleaning all masonry surfaces to remove the atmospheric and biologic soiling. At the interior, deferred maintenance at the second floor stair hall will also require additional monitoring and stabilization efforts prior to the move.

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**EXTERIOR**

The structure is primarily clad in buff brick laid in running bond. Structural engineering reports indicate that the brick walls are approximately 8" thick. The brick around the windows and at the corners projects slightly to create the effect of quoins at the corners and visual interest around the windows. This projecting brick detail around the windows was not done at the rear elevation.



Image 1 East elevation. Note brick treatment around windows and at corners as well as extensive soiling at the corners and below the second-floor level.

The brick appears to be in good condition but is very dirty with atmospheric and biologic soiling. The pattern of the most significant soiling at the corners and below the second floor suggests that some of this soiling is due to foundation plantings. The southwest corner of the building is covered with ivy from the ground up to the eaves which may conceal more serious conditions.



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Image 2 South elevation showing ivy climbing southwest corner of building.

The narrow, recessed mortar joints are largely intact with random areas of minor mortar loss, primary at the lower levels.



Image 3 Typical brick conditions showing heavily stained bricks, narrow, recessed mortar joints.

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The chimney at the north end exhibits a large crack running from the top corbelling, through approximately 10 courses, the corbeled drip course, and finally stopping approximately 4 courses below the drip course. Additional courses of brick are also cracked to the right and left of this centered crack. The rear face of the chimney was not visible during this assessment. The chimney at the south of the building exhibits some cracking through a few courses just below the drip course.

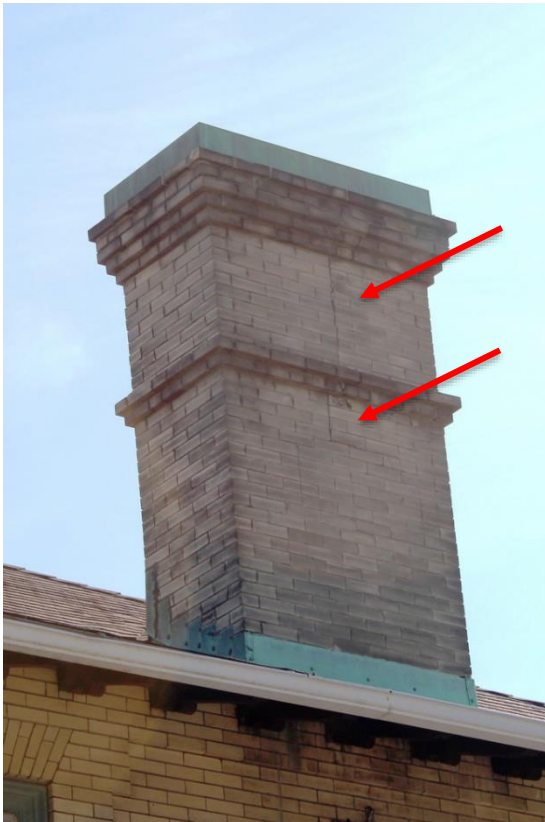


Image 4 Extensive cracking at north chimney

Extra attention should be spent in stabilizing the chimney during the building move process.

Both chimneys show a copper cap. The south chimney is the active chimney for the existing boiler. It is unclear if there are flue openings in these caps for the three fireplaces. It is unknown if the flue for the boiler is lined.

The building has an exposed ashlar limestone foundation with a limestone water table. There is mortar loss close to ground level and some areas of the limestone exhibit some exfoliation. As the interior basement is finished, it is not known if the limestone is veneer or structural. A section of exposed brick is located at the south elevation which suggests that the limestone – and the brick at that location – are veneer over a (possibly) concrete foundation.



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The band course separating the first and second floors, the keystones above the windows and the windowsills are also limestone. All limestone elements appear to be in good condition. Note that keystones are not included for the rear windows.



Image 5 South elevation showing limestone foundation with limestone water table.



Image 6 North elevation showing brick at west side of foundation.



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The portico at the front entrance is accessed from a run of five granite steps and features original wood detail elements such as the pilasters, pediment, and side lites. The front entrance door may also be original. This entrance retains an original letter slot below the left side lite and the original light fixture, originally fueled by natural gas. The original wood columns were reportedly replaced during the 1970s by the steel supports.



Image 7 Front entrance and portico. Iron supports are not original. All other elements including the postal slot and the light fixture appear to be original.



Image 8 Original light fixture in front entrance portico. Fixture has been electrified, but original gas mantle is extant.



Image 9 Original letter slot below left sidelite at front entrance.

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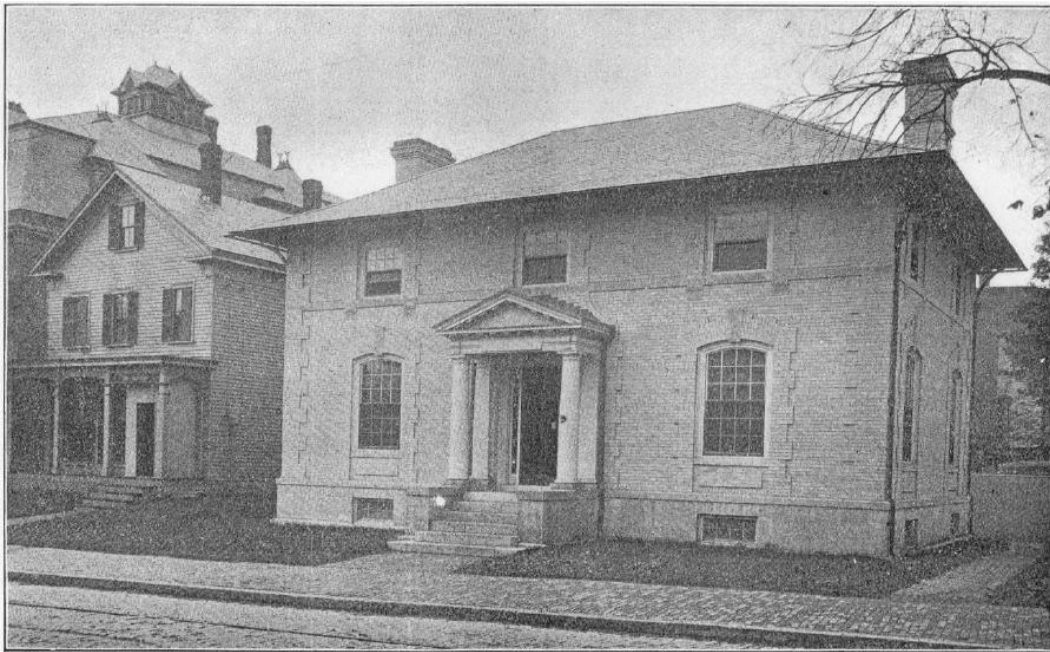


Image 10 Circa 1906 image showing 15 Ferry Street building with wood columns at the entrance portico.  
image source: *Massachusetts Historical Commission Form B, MAL.491, 2019.*



Image 11 Circular outline of original wood column, granite base at front portico.



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Original wood windows remain at all elevations. The windows are a mix of 12-over-12 (first floor) and 8-over-8 (second floor) double hung sash. The first-floor window at the south end of the rear elevation is a casement window. The paint coating on the windows and doors appears to be in good condition.

The exterior aluminum storm windows are in fair condition, with significant damage at one window on the north elevation. These storm windows are not original, but they have helped protect the original sash. Given the condition of the exterior storm windows and associated screens, replacement of these storm windows following a building move is recommended. Where they are intact, they may provide an additional level of protection during the anticipated building move.

At the basement level, window openings (two per elevation) have either been covered over or have been fitted with window air conditioning units. Where there is not an air conditioning unit, these basement windows retain original metal grillwork secured to the limestone foundation.



Image 12 First floor windows, northeast corner. Window at right has damaged exterior storm window.

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Image 13 Basement window openings showing either original metal grille work or modern air conditioning unit fit into plywood opening.

The building's roof is clad in asphalt shingle and includes a shingled cricket located at the base of each chimney. The date of the current asphalt roof installation is unknown; however, it does appear to be in good condition. The deep projecting cornice features wood rafter tails. These rafter tails appear to have been stained in the past. While this element is largely protected from the weather, the stain coating appears to be weathering off.



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Image 14 View of roof showing asphalt shingles and original skylight for attic space.



Image 15 View of roof overhang showing original rafter tails.

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**INTERIOR**

The interior of the building is well maintained and retains a significant amount of original character defining features at the first and second floors. These features include the original spatial layout as well as original woodwork with a clear finish on the first floor and painted finish on the second floor, three original fireplaces, double hung sash, wood doors, a central stairway with landing and partial Palladian window, and transoms over the second-floor doors. The original plaster walls and ceilings appear to be in good condition. The floors are carpeted with a low pile industrial carpet and likely cover original wood strip flooring. All painted finishes are in good condition. The lighting fixtures appear to be a later 20<sup>th</sup> century alteration.



Image 16 View of first floor stair hall from entrance vestibule. All woodwork and spatial configuration are original. Far door is located in shed addition at rear of building (not original).

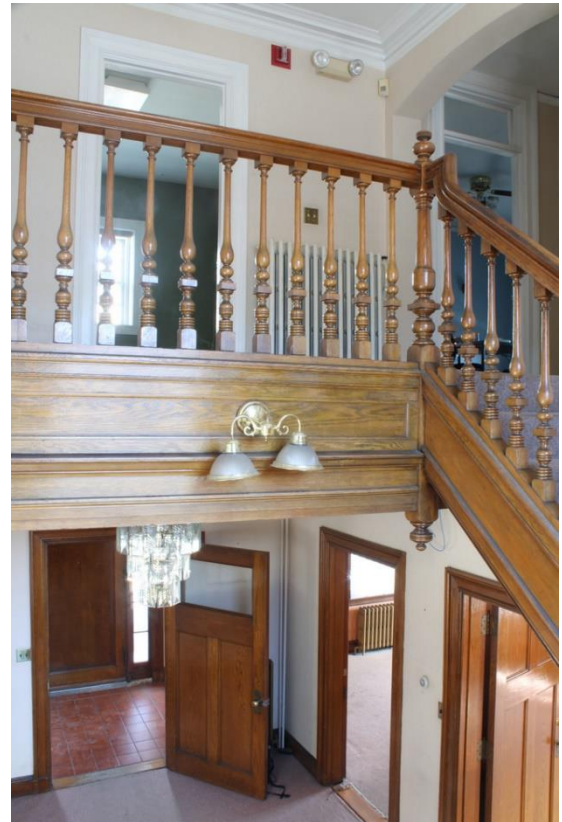


Image 17 View from stair hall landing. Note original transom over second floor door at right.

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Image 18 Principal first floor room as seen from entrance vestibule looking northwest. Original wood wainscot, fireplace surround, baseboard and cornice.



Image 19 Principal first floor room as seen looking toward entrance vestibule looking southeast. Original wood wainscot, doors and associated surround, baseboard and cornice.



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Image 20 Smaller first floor room at southwest corner. Room retains original wood doors and trim, chair rail, baseboard and cornice.



Image 21 Typical second floor room at southeast corner. Room retains original wood door and trim, transom, baseboard and cornice.



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Access to the attic space is gained through a ceiling hatch in a small room adjacent to the stairway. The attic reveals that the framing is dimensional wood lumber. The attic floor space is at least partially filled with cellulose insulation. The chimneys are not visible in the attic space due to the pitch of the roof and the location of the chimneys at the eaves. An original wood cistern is located towards the south end of the attic. It should be confirmed that the cistern is empty before moving the building.



Image 22 View in attic, looking north. Small amount of masonry associated with chimney is just visible in center of image.

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Image 23 View in attic, looking south. Note original wood cistern at this location.

At the basement level, modern alterations include vinyl paneling and acoustical drop tile ceilings with fluorescent light fixtures. Through an access panel in the southeast basement room, it appears that the original basement had some degree of finish with a plaster wall and painted wood baseboard. Removed ceiling tiles indicate the ceiling of the basement space was also finished with plaster.



Image 24 Basement view showing typical finished conditions including late 20<sup>th</sup> century slab doors, wood trim, and vinyl wall paneling.

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Image 25 View in basement corridor showing original stairway from first floor; looking north.



Image 26 View in wall opening showing original painted plaster wall and small section of wood baseboard trim. Details suggest an original level of finish to the basement space.

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The cornice at the second-floor stair hall warrants extra attention and stabilization prior to the move. The cornice in the locations pictured shows evidence of possible leaking and deferred maintenance. The locations are directly across from each other at the top of the stairway. While there are other instances of plaster cracking of ceilings that may reflect overlading of the second-floor office spaces (bookshelves, files, etc.) over time, these two areas stand out for the irregularity of finish.



Image 27 View of cornice, second floor stair hall, looking south. Note cracking and irregularity of finish at this location. Same condition is observed at opposite end of stair hall.

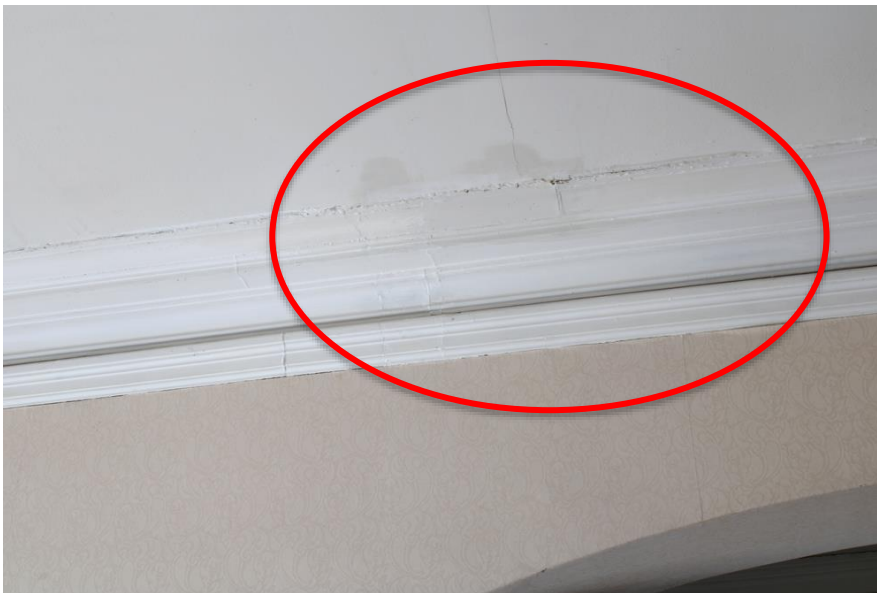


Image 28 View of cornice, second floor stair hall, looking north. Note cracking and irregularity of finish at this location. Same condition is observed at opposite end of stair hall.



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As noted in the exterior section of this report, there is a large crack in the north chimney. In the second-floor rooms below this chimney, there is obvious evidence of water damage due to water infiltration through that chimney crack. After the building is successfully relocated and the chimney repaired, the interior finishes should be restored.



Image 29 Water damage in ceiling of northwest room, below chimney with large crack.



Image 30 Water damage in ceiling of closet of northeast room, below chimney with large crack.

