

# FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

22/37	Reading		407
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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
 MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
 220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
 BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

**Town:** Reading

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*) Downtown

## Photograph



**Address:** 643 Main Street

**Historic Name:** Bank Building

**Uses:** Present: professional offices

Original: commercial/public hall

**Date of Construction:** 1860

**Source:** *At Wood End*, p. 160

**Style/Form:** French Second Empire (altered)

**Architect/Builder:** John Stevens

## Exterior Material:

Foundation: granite

Wall/Trim: brick

Roof: tar & gravel

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**  
none

## Major Alterations (*with dates*):

1926 – 2<sup>nd</sup> floor façade windows changed,  
 rear two-story, wood-frame add. facing Pleasant St.  
 1959 – third floor (& mansard roof) removed, south add.

**Condition:** good

**Moved:** no | x | yes | | **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Acreage:** 0.15 acre

**Setting:** mixed downtown area

## Topographic or Assessor's Map



**Recorded by:** Lisa Mausolf

**Organization:** Reading Historical Commission

**Date** (*month / year*): December 2009

**RECEIVED**  
**AUG 20 2010**  
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# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

READING

643 MAIN STREET

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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

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

Located at the southeast corner of Main Street and Pleasant Street, the Bank Building is a two-story brick structure originally designed in the French Second Empire style but now lacking its character-defining mansard roof which was removed in 1959. Other important original features which do survive include the corner brick quoins, corbelled brick cornice, the brick band between the stories, the footed window sills on the second story of the façade and the granite piers at the ends of the façade as well as the granite door surround. The first floor storefronts have been remodeled several times. Originally they consisted of large plate glass windows over granite aprons; the glass area was later greatly reduced. Much of the window area was filled with brick and the present smaller tripartite sets of double-hung windows were inserted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The shallow copper canopy supported by square wooden posts is also a later addition. In 1920 the second floor façade windows were changed and a gambrel wall dormer at the center of the façade was removed and the cornice repaired accordingly. At that time, the triple arched window at the center of the façade was replaced by the present tripartite window which is Palladian/Colonial Revival in effect with fluted pilasters. It is flanked by two rectangular openings, now containing pairs of 6/6 windows with transom lights above but which in 1920 were single, multi-light units. The granite sills were reused from the original arched window openings (a triple in the center flanked by two pairs). A pedimented vault alarm, a reminder of the building's former use as a bank, remains on the façade.

The north and south elevations are both five bays wide with 6/6 windows with rectangular, rough hewn granite sills and lintels. The first floor windows have transoms. Projecting from the south side is a single-story, flat-roofed, brick addition constructed in 1959. Offset to the northeast, facing Pleasant Street, is a two-story, flat-roofed addition constructed c.1920 to provide access to the upper floors. The vinyl-sided building projects slightly into the sidewalk compared to the original structure and the junction of original addition is marked by an angled wall. The first floor has a recessed entry and 6/6 windows over paneled aprons. The upstairs windows contain 1/1 units.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*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.*

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century this site was occupied by a tavern built by Nathan Parker in 1806 in order to take advantage of the Andover-Medford Turnpike (present-day Main Street) which was established that same year. In 1860 the tavern was replaced by an imposing brick building with mansard roof, indicative of the French Second Empire style. It was constructed for the Reading Agricultural and Mechanic Association, the town's first banking institution, which was organized in 1831. The new building was designed by John Stevens, an architect-builder from South Reading (Wakefield). The building was constructed by Oliver Wallace of Reading. Difficulties in securing enough bricks initially delayed construction.

The space on the (former) third story was known as Ellsworth Hall and was used by the Christian Union Church and by the Masons. In the late 1890s and until about 1906 the J.S. Temple Neckwear Company manufactured cravats on the second floor and used the assembly hall for storage and shipping. A fire on November 31, 1906 damaged the building and resulted in the departure of the necktie company. The upper hall was later used as a meeting place for the Knights of Pythias, the Pythian Sisters, the Ancient Order of United Workmen, the Board of Trade, and the Metropolitan Reading Poultry Association. Still later it was utilized by the Rotary Club who left in the 1950s.

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## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (continued)

Various stores were located here over the years. Ira Gray & Co., merchant tailor, draper and dealer in men's furnishings, occupied the southern of the front rooms when the building was first completed and Miss Temple's millinery shop was located upstairs. After Ira Gray died in 1871, the southern store was occupied by a series of grocery stores. Alfred Danforth had an apothecary shop on the Pleasant Street corner from 1871 until 1908. This was later the space occupied by the grocery store of E.S. Gray. The storefront tenants included George Whiting's General Store, a traveling medicine show and then George Winchester had an art and novelty store in the early 1900s.

Beginning in 1870 the Board of Selectmen utilized the second floor. The Town Library used the building from 1884 until 1898. Over the years, the building served as the headquarters for several banks including the Reading Agricultural and Mechanics Association, the National Bank, and the Reading Savings Bank.

In 1920 the Mechanics Savings Bank purchased the building and shared its space with the Reading Cooperative Bank. In 1926 extensive alterations were made to the building including the removal of the peak in the mansard roof. At the same time, the original arched window openings on the façade were removed and replaced by the present, larger windows. A new addition on the north, Pleasant Street side, provided access to the upper floors.

In 1957 the Reading Cooperative Bank relocated to 180 Haven Street. The Mechanics Savings Bank became the Reading Savings Bank and modernized the structure in 1959, removing the entire third floor mansard roof and adding the single-story addition on the south side of the building. In 1975 the savings bank moved to 123 Haven Street and the building at 643 Main Street became the Latham & Latham law offices.

The original architect, John Stevens, worked in South Reading (Wakefield) between 1847 and about 1874. His other known works include the Steven Hall House at 64 Minot Street in Reading (c.1850), 21 Chestnut Street in Wakefield (1850), First Congregational Church in Woburn (1860), Wakefield Town Hall (1871), alterations to the Bank Block in Woburn (c.1870) and the Melrose City Hall (1874).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

Bishop, C. Nelson. "Neat Brick Edifice: Biography of a Building", 1959. [Reading Historical Commission].

Massachusetts Historical Commission, MACRIS database.

Reading Public Library, Photograph and Postcard Collection, NOBLE Digital Library Archive

Reading 350<sup>th</sup> Book Committee. *At Wood End – Reading, Massachusetts 1644-1994, A Pictorial History*, 1994.

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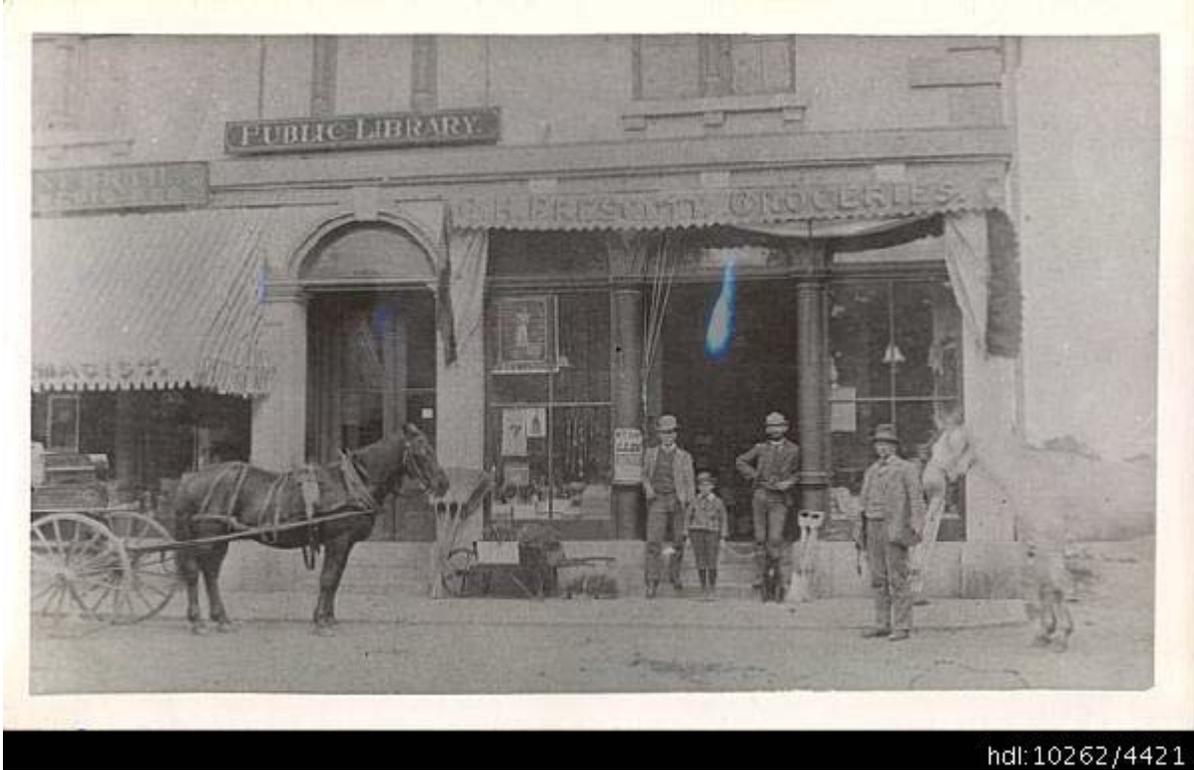
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1888 View of Prescott storefront

Source: Reading Public Library, NOBLE Digital Library Archive

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Source: Reading Public Library, Murphy Postcard Collection,  
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Post 1926 view (note changes to mansard roof and second floor windows)

Source: Reading Public Library, Murphy Postcard Collection,  
NOBLE Digital Library Archive