

# To Gather Together

After years of neglect, a restored 19th-century town hall near Boston is once again the focus of a community's pride.

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Town Hall occupies a prominent site on Main Street in downtown Andover.

The patrician Boston suburb of Andover is hardly the kind of place that forsakes its historic civic buildings. Yet for many years Andover Town Hall sat forlornly on Main Street like some scruffy uninvited guest at an elegant New England garden party. Although the red-brick Italianate structure, designed by Theodore Voelkers as Andover's first public building after the town separated from the community of North Andover in 1855, had never descended into total dereliction, Town Hall was definitely underused, undermaintained, and underappreciated, especially after the town's government abandoned it for new offices in 1986.

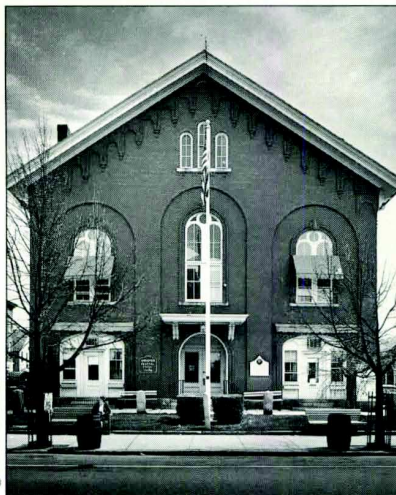
That same year, a group of local citizens led by the Andover Historical Commission began pressing for the building's renovation and adaptive use. The town commissioned Ann Beha Associates, a small Boston firm specializing in preservation, to develop a plan that called for restoring the building's handsome, but delapidated, second-story auditorium to its original function as a public gathering place, with the ground floor given over to commercial use and a downtown branch of the U. S. Post Office.

"The project initially was about generating enthusiasm," recalls Ann Beha. "The building's original features had been unsympathetically altered over the years, and

most people in Andover were unaware of its architectural character." Following months of public hearings—and encouraged by a videotaped tour of the building that was broadcast over a local cable channel—residents attending Andover's annual town meeting in April 1987 voted to spend just under \$2 million in local capital monies for the structure's restoration.

Much of that funding went toward reinforcing the building's brick piers and wood structural members with new steel beams along the underside of the auditorium and additional rows of steel columns that were extended into the basement and anchored in concrete footings. Though the building was in no immediate danger of catastrophic failure, the architects strengthened existing structural connections with metal anchors, joist hangers, and truss plates to bring the facility up to current code, and they inserted new steel trusses into the attic to support the auditorium's air-handling units.

What's more, Beha and her colleagues carefully incorporated elements relating to the current-day need for energy efficiency, accessibility, and comfort. New roof insulation and interior aluminum storm windows, for example, temper the impact of Andover's harsh winters, and a small elevator slipped into a former rear stairwell allows the physically challenged to bypass Town

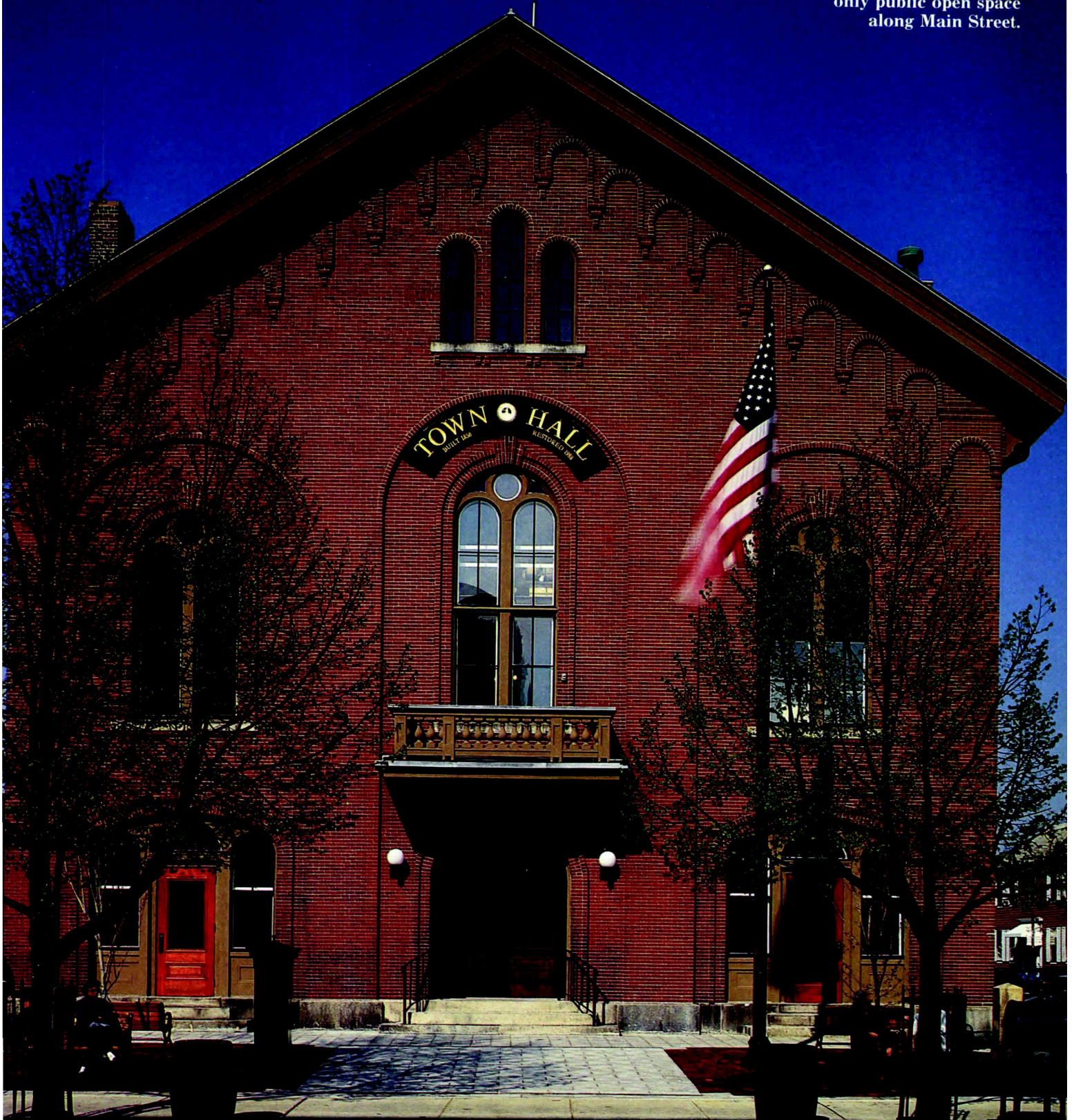


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View before restoration. The building was largely vacated after Andover constructed new town offices in 1986.

**Andover Town Hall Restoration**  
*Andover, Massachusetts*  
*Ann Beha Associates, Architects*

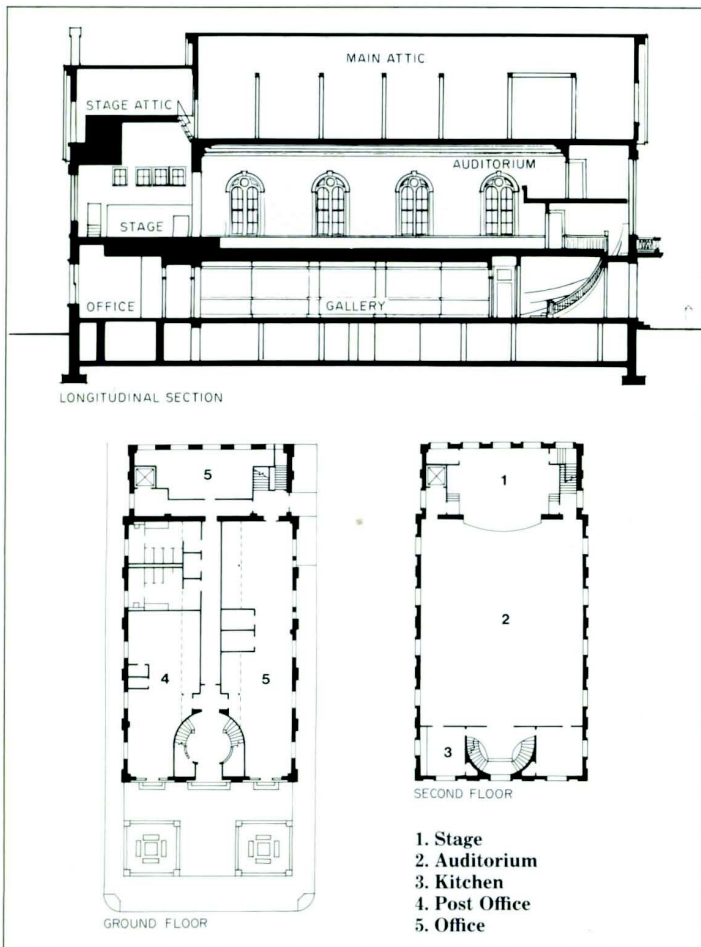
**View after restoration.**  
Exterior work included  
repointing brick, repainting  
wood trim in 19th-century  
colors, and replacing a  
second-story balcony. A  
relandscaped brick-  
and-granite plaza is the  
only public open space  
along Main Street.





Painter Michael Orlando reproduced the auditorium's decorative wall stenciling from a surviving 19th-century section that the architects discovered underneath later wood paneling. Repainted window shutters are original.

A curved stair (top right) leads to the restored auditorium (below right). Aided by a 19th-century pattern book, the architects replicated the room's plaster cornice in glass-fiber-reinforced concrete.



Hall's daunting (for the handicapped) curved main stairway.

Although work on the building's exterior was extensive, it was relatively straightforward—a new slate roof, repointed brick, and a rebuilt version of a missing second-story balcony. Not so for the interior, where the architects based much of an elaborate restoration program on photographs of the building taken around 1900 and on paint analysis carried out by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

In the auditorium 80-year-old painter Michael Orlando reproduced 19th-century wall stenciling from a surviving section that project architect Pamela Hawkes discovered beneath later wood paneling. The auditorium's original plaster cornice and stage frame, removed during the 1950s, were refabricated in glass-fiber-reinforced concrete with the help of a 19th-century plasterer's handbook and a single discarded modillion found behind a door. The room's air-conditioning supply grilles are set neatly between stencil patterns in the ceiling, while brass chandeliers and sconces are stock items that evoke the spirit, if not the exact detail, of the original gas fixtures. The architects chose to furnish the auditorium with 200 modern contract stacking chairs because, according to Hawkes, "the building never had fancy seating before—just utilitarian wood benches—and the town required easily removable seats."



**The auditorium before \$2.1-million restoration.**

Since its rededication earlier this year, those seats have been well used, for events ranging from wedding receptions and class reunions to chamber-music recitals and community theater. A senior-citizen drop-in center occupies part of the ground floor, and the post office is expected to open by year's end. Recalling the long approval process that led to the building's rebirth—and the fact that some people initially wanted Town Hall demolished for downtown parking—town manager Kevin Mahoney said that "this project could have split Andover apart. Instead, it has brought everyone together."

**PAUL M. SACHNER**

*Andover Town Hall Restoration  
Andover, Massachusetts*

**OWNER:** Town of Andover

**ARCHITECT:** Ann Beha Associates—Ann M. Beha, principal-in-charge; Pamela W. Hawkes, project architect; John Englund, Jean Carroon, project architects

**ENGINEERS:** Structural Technology (structural); Fitzmeyer & Tocci (mechanical); EBM, Inc. (electrical)

**CONSULTANTS:** Ripman Lighting (lighting); Cavanaugh-Tocci (acoustics); Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (historic finishes); Patricia Pratt (landscape)

**GENERAL CONTRACTOR:** Mansco, Inc.