

# The Gibson House (Interior)

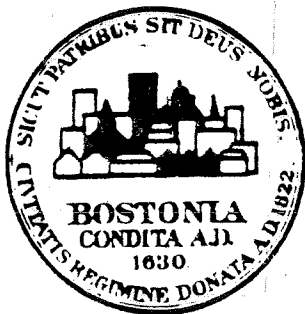
Boston Landmarks Commission Study Report



Petition #149 137 Beacon Street, Boston

# **The Gibson House**

## **(Interior)**



**Boston Landmarks Commission  
Environment Department  
City of Boston**

Report of the Boston Landmarks Commission

on the potential designation of

The Gibson House Interior

as a

LANDMARK

under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended

Approved:

Michael C. Carraro March 3, 1992

Acting Director, Boston Landmarks Comm./Date

Approved:

Alan K. Chan March 3, 1992

Chairman/Date

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## Acknowledgements:

The Staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission greatly appreciates the work of Catherine L. Seiberling, Gibson Society consultant and author of the Gibson House Study. The report was researched in part by Stephen Jerome and John Burroughs. Information provided in the report was of tremendous value to the Commission staff in the preparation of this study report.

## 1.0 LOCATION OF THE PROPERTY

### 1.1 Address:

The Gibson House is located at 137 Beacon Street in the Back Bay section of Boston. The building is in Ward 5, Parcel 2802.

### 1.2 Area in which the property is located:

The Gibson House is located on the south side of Beacon Street, between Arlington and Berkeley Streets in the Back Bay. The house is one of approximately two thousand row houses in the Back Bay, developed between 1859 and 1900. The abutting house at 135 Beacon Street was designed and constructed as a companion to the Gibson House.

The Back Bay was originally a tidal backwash separating the Boston Peninsula along its western border from the town of Brookline. During the first half of the 19th century, the Back Bay was dammed and used unsuccessfully for milling operations. In 1851, a 96 mile sewer system was completed and by the mid-1850s, the filling of the Back Bay had begun at Arlington Street. Over four hundred acres of dry usable land was created by this landfill, making the Back Bay one of the largest land reclamation projects ever undertaken in the country.

In 1859, the first houses of the Back Bay were under construction. By 1869, buildings covered approximately 30% of the Back Bay. Construction peaked in 1868 with 89 structures built in that year alone.

The new area was laid out as a fashionable residential district following an axial plan by architect Arthur Gilman. Gilman had traveled to Paris to study the rebuilding of portions of that city; his design for the Back Bay is a reflection of the burgeoning American interest in French architecture and city planning. This was a radical shift from the residential squares and crescents found in Beacon Hill, the North End and the area that now comprises the financial district which followed English patterns in urban design.

The cohesiveness of the plan was ensured by a number of farsighted zoning and building restrictions. These restrictions included mandatory building setbacks (20-25 feet from the street curb), height limits, and the use of selected building materials, masonry and brick.

Other original planning considerations designed to safeguard the area's residential character were the conscious exclusion of almost all business and commercial facilities, introduction of a system of service alleys, and the setting aside and occasional donation of chosen building lots for parks and public institutions. The Back Bay is renowned as one of the most ambitious campaigns of urban neighborhood design and planning in this country's history.

The Back Bay was fashionable as a residential neighborhood of single-family dwellings until the Great Depression, when economic conditions and other factors influenced a movement to the suburbs. In recent decades, the Back Bay has again become a desirable location, however, there are very few single family rowhouses remaining. New uses for single family houses include apartment buildings, institutions (mainly academic), medical offices and condominiums, all which have altered the interior architectural integrity of many buildings.

The Gibson House is within the Back Bay National Register District and the Back Bay Architectural District.

1.3 Map showing location:

Attached.





The Gibson House  
137 Beacon Street  
Back Bay  
Boston, MA

FENW.



## 2.0 DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 Type and Use:

The Gibson House is a single family residential row house, one in a series along the south side of Beacon Street between Arlington and Berkeley Streets. The house was the principal residence for Catherine Hammond Gibson (John Gardiner Gibson's widow) and her family for three generations from 1860 to 1954. Since 1954, the Gibson House has been maintained as a Victorian House Museum.

### 2.2 Current Appearance:

The Gibson House stands on a rectangular lot, facing north onto Beacon Street. The rear elevation faces a shared alley with Marlborough Street.

The Gibson House interior has remained essentially unaltered since the beginning of the Gibson family occupancy. Alterations include necessary structural repairs and a few minor cosmetic changes. All details and floor plans described in the following sections are original to the Gibson family tenure (1860 to 1954) unless otherwise noted.

In general, the floors beneath carpets and linoleum are soft pine and the ceilings and wall surfaces are plaster. The public rooms feature simple decorative cornices and wainscotting made of molded lincrusta or stained wooden matchboard.

#### Ground Floor (Basement)

The basement is dominated by a large kitchen (25'x 20') at the southern end. It also includes storage closets, a servant's lavatory, a furnace room off a central hallway and a small laundry and drying room. This floor contains very little architectural detailing; the emphasis is strictly functional and utilitarian.

The basement floor is covered with stained, narrow pine boards while the woodwork is dark stained oak. Doors to the laundry, kitchen and lavatory have two panels of opaque glass; all doors have black porcelain knobs.

A long, rectangular shed adjoins the rear of the house at the eastern edge of the property. The shed contains a coal bin serviced from the alley, a cold pantry and a closet. The cold pantry has a zinc floor and stained matchboard walls.

The inner shed door opens into the kitchen, a room lighted by a pair of two-over-two windows on the south wall. The kitchen can also be reached by a central door from the hallway on the north wall. A replacement wooden floor was installed in the early 1980s. Door and window trim is made of stained oak. The walls are painted light yellow.

Built-in cupboards span the east wall, while the west wall features a built-in Smith & Anthony stove that dates from 1884. The stove is set into a brick surround and hearth, and has a ventilator hood. To the right of the stove are built-in wooden cupboards, a hot water tank and a soapstone sink. A small pantry is entered through a door adjacent to the stove on the north wall. It has built-in drawers and shelves and a dumbwaiter that goes to the butler's pantry on the first floor.

A significant remaining feature in the kitchen is a set of servant call bells that hang above the door to the hallway. Eleven bells, each with a different tone and number, are attached to wires that connect into the west wall near the stove and are operated by pulleys.

Doors off the hallway provide access to the servants' lavatory, the staircase to the first floor, three storage closets, the furnace room and the laundry area on the north end. The laundry area retains its original dark grey flooring and fixtures. Originally the room was a large square area with a smaller drying room, however, a dividing wall was added in the 1960s to conceal the presence of modern laundry appliances. On the west wall, a wash boiler tub and stove to heat irons are built-in to a brick surround. Heat provided by the iron stove and fire box under the wash boiler passed to the drying room via a grille in the bricks. On the north wall, a large soapstone sink lies beneath the window. Brass and copper plumbing runs along the west wall and in the sink.

The hallway has original pipes and shafts that conduct forced hot air to the upper floors. It retains its original stained oak flooring, with a small cut-away door giving access to the foundation. A small, black iron door on the east wall leads to the original furnace room where an oil furnace was installed in the early twentieth century. The door once enabled coal to be loaded into the furnace directly from the hallway.

The lavatory is original and intact. The door has four small holes on top and bottom for ventilation and two panels of etched opaque glass. The original water closet remains, but there is no sink. The floor of the lavatory is covered with 19th century linoleum which is also found on the dumbwaiter shelves and in some other closets throughout the house. The walls are covered with vertical matchboard. A small closet with shelves is set into the back wall.

#### First Floor

The first floor is dominated by the spacious entry hall that adjoins the dining room on the south side of the building. In the entry hall, two windows flank the black walnut central entry door. The windows retain their original interior black walnut shutters. The central entry has two interior seats with cupboards beneath. The interior entry doors have diamond patterned etched glass panels, one has gold numbers "137" and brass hardware.

The "Japan Paper" on the entry hall walls is in good condition; it has a gold embossed design on a cream background, although the original cream-color has greyed with age. A gold picture rail caps the wallpaper in the entry hall and on the second floor landing.

The carpet on the first floor is a red, two-frame Wilton design from the Edwardian period. It has a small intertwined diaper pattern, and is worn and faded in places. The carpet is also used on the stairs and on the second floor hall. All the trim, woodwork and interior shutters on the first floor, with the exception of the back stair hall, is black walnut that has darkened in some places. White plaster ceilings, with simple plaster cornices are found in the entry hall, the staircase and the dining room. All the interior doors have mercury glass doorknobs with the exception of the entry door which has a brass knob and the doors in the pantry and back stairs which have black porcelain knobs.

The dining room, at the rear of the house, is lit by a pair of two over two windows which look out on the back alley. The room is entered through a pair of arched black walnut doors with etched glass panels. Decorative features in the dining room include: a carved, black walnut fireplaces on the west wall; a brass gasolier hanging from a black walnut ceiling medallion; and, a black walnut picture rail. The walls are plaster, the ceiling is painted a cream color and the wallpaper is a gold burlap pattern, now tarnished to dark green. The carpet is the same as that found in the entry hall. The small china closet contains built-in oak cupboard and shelves; the floor covering in the china closet is linoleum.

Between the dining room and the entrance hall are a butler's pantry and lavatory. The pantry is lined with floor to ceiling cupboards. A short passageway leading from the back hall to the dining room divides the pantry. An original copper-bottomed sink is set into the oak countertop along the east wall; on the west wall, the dumbwaiter rises from the basement.

The lavatory on this level has a black walnut door with etched glass panels, an oak floor, black walnut matchboard wainscoting and green plaster walls. The toilet is black walnut and the fixtures appear to be turn of the century replacements. A small round-arched door below the stairs leads to a small closet. Adjacent to the butler's pantry, a narrow staircase rises from the back hall to the second floor.

### Second Floor

The second floor is arranged in a simple and symmetrical fashion. Two major rooms, the music room and the library, are separated by a passageway and occupy most of the floor. The cream plaster ceilings have heavy cornices but are devoid of ornament; their height is greater than other cornices in the house. As on the first floor, all doors have mercury glass doorknobs.

The hallway features black walnut woodwork, and the same carpet and wallpaper that is used on the staircase and first floor entrance hall. Protruding from the ceiling above the staircase is the rounded end of the ventilator shaft. The end has a semi-circular etched glass opening and is framed with black walnut. The interior of the shaft is painted light green with gold stencil-work.

Arched black walnut doors divide the hallway and the rooms. The library, at the front half of the house, is illuminated by an oriel window in the north elevation. The west wall is dominated by a black walnut mantelpiece which surrounds a coal-burning fireplace. The library wallpaper, like the paper used in the dining room, is a slightly tarnished, gold burlap pattern.

The Music Room also has an oriel window that projects from the south wall and a large marble mantelpiece that surrounds a wood-burning fireplace. Lincrusta wainscotting, painted white, borders the room at the dado. The floor is covered with light-colored hardwood, and the room is papered in a vertical striped pattern of yellow and rose. A large brass and crystal chandelier hangs in the center of the room, with matching sconces flanking the fireplace.

A pair of round arched black walnut doors off the hallway lead to the back stairhall. The stair continues its rise from the second floor to the upper floors. The entire span is constructed of oak and the stairway walls are wallpapered in a 1960s replacement pattern. The front stair ends at the second floor.

### Third Floor

The third floor is the location of the family bedrooms. On this floor the ceilings are slightly lower and the woodwork is made of oak. All doors on this level have mercury glass doorknobs and sliding bolts. The plan on the third floor is similar to the second, with two major rooms in front and back divided by a central passageway.

The front bedroom, presently used as a study, has two symmetrically placed two-over-two windows on the north elevation. Decorative features include cream colored linoleum wainscotting and an oak mantelpiece with fluted surrounds enveloping a shallow fireplace. The east wall shows evidence of two electric buzzers and a pull cord that activated a bell in the other bedroom.

The room has one closet which has the same dimension and construction as the china closet in the dining room. The closet has built-in oak cupboards and shelves. Another door opens into a small dressing room that is lined with a built-in wardrobe on the east wall. This room adjoins the ventilator shaft and connects to the bathroom through another oak door.

The bathroom is large and can be accessed through both bedrooms and from the hallway. The ventilator can be opened from this room and from the hall by a window. A light stained oak floor appears original. There are also several built-in wardrobes, cabinets, drawers and cupboards. Lavatory fixtures including the toilet, sink and bathtub, date from an 1890s renovation. The toilet is encased in varnished chestnut.

The rear bedroom can be entered through the passageway as well as through a door in the bathroom. This room is slightly larger than the front bedroom. A pair of symmetrical two-over-two windows pierce the south wall. A colonial revival mahogany mantelpiece surrounds a wood-burning fireplace in the west wall. A closet in the northwest corner of the room retains its original cupboards with pull-down doors and drawers. Crank pulleys to ring the kitchen flank the bed and appear to be part of the internal call bell system. Both bedrooms are lit by matched sconces on each side of the fireplace and between the windows flanking furniture.

#### Fourth Floor

The fourth floor is similar to the plan of the second and third floors, but with some modifications. As on the third level, the front room occupies the entire northern portion of the floor and serves as a large open bedroom. This bedroom has three adjoining central windows on the north facade. A fireplace on the center of the west wall has a black walnut mantelpiece and black marble hearth, similar to the one found in the second floor library. A door, to the left of the entry door facing south, leads into a series of two storage closets or dressing rooms that surround the ventilator shaft. Both are part of a mid-twentieth century kitchen, yet retain some of their original oak shelving, cupboards and vertical, stained oak matchboard.

The bathroom also retains its large floor to ceiling cabinet on the east wall. The room appears to have been remodelled at some point, and it is unlikely that the room originally contained a bathtub. There is currently a modern bathtub and shower in the bathroom. A door, facing south, leads to the rear bedroom. The remains of a speaker tube system is also evident.

The rear space is divided into two separate bedrooms which are not the same size (the east bedroom is slightly larger). The rooms can be combined by opening a pair of original oak pocket doors. A transom window on top of the door of the east bedroom can be opened into the hallway, but each room is primarily lit by its own south facing window. The west bedroom has a simple white marble fireplace with decorative green tiles flanked by an enclosed, built-in cupboard unit to the left.

#### Fifth Floor

On the fifth floor, there are four small rooms leading off the hallway, each of varying size. Unlike the other floors, no rooms on this level interconnect. Four chamber doors - two on either end of the hall - open out onto the hallway. A door to the right of the ventilator window, near the center of the hallway, leads to a bathroom. A storage closet, now a kitchen, is on the left side of the ventilator. All woodwork on this level is stained oak. The floors were originally covered with "battleship" linoleum, still extant in some locations. It is from this level that one can reach the roof through a hatch via a ladder in the bathroom. The ceiling height on this floor is eight feet, noticeably less than the height on other floors.

There are four bedrooms on this level, each has slightly different dimensions. The two bedrooms on the north side are divided equally, although the length of the northwest room is diminished by a closet. This room has a coal fireplace with a black marble mantel on the west wall. The northeast bedroom has a built in cupboard unit. The southwest bedroom is the largest of the four with a simple white marble mantelpiece surrounding a shallow coal fireplace. This room also has a large closet. The southeast bedroom is the smallest of the four with a built-in cupboard unit. Each bedroom is lit by one window.

A large bathroom is entered from the hallway. The interior is dominated by the span of the ventilator and a ladder going up to the roof; walls are covered with a vertical, stained oak matchboard wainscotting. It is likely that this bathroom was originally constructed with a bathtub, toilet and sink. A c.1890 claw-foot bathtub and a modern sink and toilet have replaced the original fixtures.

Description of Significant Remaining Features, Systems  
and Fixtures

A significant number of original gas lighting fixtures from the Gibson family tenure remain throughout the house. Originally designed for gas, these fixtures were all converted to electricity, and include brass gasoliers and sconces. Some sconces and table lights were donated after 1957.

An unusual remnant is the ventilator shaft that rises from the second floor ceiling to the roof. It retains all original detailing including its oak-trimmed, frosted glass windows that open out onto the shaft at several locations on each floor. The ventilator features light green paint with cream colored stencils in a Japanese style, dating from the 1890 renovation. There is a circular divided vent on the second floor ceiling that can be opened from the third floor bathroom.

While the coal furnace has been replaced with an oil burning furnace, the system of heating at the Gibson House is still principally reliant on "self-rising" hot air from the basement through the registers throughout the house. Original registers grills, usually one per room, are extant in certain rooms, as are the large, tin-plated steel ducts that carry the heat from the basement to various locations.

Fireplaces and surrounding decorative mantelpieces remain intact in all locations, though not all are original to the house. An interesting ventilation feature is the plaster ceiling medallion in the dining room. It is pierced with small holes designed to vent fumes from the gasolier into a pipe within the ceiling which vented the gas vapors into the chimney flue.

The original mechanical pulley system for family-to-servant communication is intact, although no longer working because of snapped wires within the walls. Thin wires ran from a series of eleven bells, in the basement to various locations throughout the house. When pulled from different cranks located in all family quarters, the mechanical actions would trigger a certain bell located over the kitchen door in the basement. Many hallways, notably the fifth floor landing and back stairs on the first floor, retain bells that are also part of this system.

A c. 1950 wall-mounted telephone is located in the back stair hall on the first floor. An early 20th century telephone is located on the second floor landing. The original brass-pull doorbell is still intact, but is now battery-operated and no longer triggers a series of bells. Other vestiges of family communication systems are the bell-pulls located in each bedroom on the third floor.

### Carpets

The carpets and wallpapers at the Gibson House are of the finest quality for their time, and reflect a high level of sophisticated style and taste. All are original to the Gibson family with the exception of the carpet in the third floor rear bedroom and the wallpaper in the back hall staircase which were replaced after the museum was established.

Although the simple carpet patterns in principal rooms might have been less costly than more elaborate and highly colored patterns, the existence of the multicolored runner on the family stairs (woven in cut pile, the most expensive form of carpet) suggest that economy was not the motivating factor, but that the less complex designs were chosen for their style.

In the entrance hall, the floor is covered with a cut pile Wilton carpet with a high density of tufts per inch (around 100) woven in 27" width. The pattern is a simple geometric design in two tones of red, the design of which has a small scale and an overall sense of balance. It was manufactured by Bigelow (Clinton, Massachusetts) and probably dates between c. 1895 and the early 1900s. This same pattern is carried throughout the first floor, laid wall-to-wall without borders in both the entrance and the dining room. The carpet design is also carried up the stairs, fitted from baseboard to balusters without borders, and is used in the second floor hallway at the top of the main stairs.

In the second floor, the library has a cut pile Wilton carpet of high tuft density woven in 27" width in a solid rich blue color without any pattern. The Music Room received hardwood flooring in 1890 and has Chinese rugs over the wood.

On the third floor, the study has an Axminster carpet with approximately 56 tufts per inch. Its foundation structure is badly deteriorated as of 1991, and there are large holes in the carpet. It is woven in 27" width and has a figure in an ogee curve motif, executed in tone on tone reds.

In the dressing room off the third floor study, are two widths of 27" Brussels loop pile carpeting in a small octagonal geometric design, woven in tones of green. Although its date is undocumented, it appears to be the same carpet visible in c. 1960 photographs of the third floor bedroom, taken before the carpet in that bedroom was replaced by the museum committee. Presently, a broad loom Axminster carpet from the 1960s with a pale background and large cabbage roses in in the bedroom. While Victorian in feeling, this carpet bears no relation to the specific decorative style of the house during the Gibson family tenure.



The back stairhall has several surviving sections of a blue "Turkey" style hall runner. The runner has a pattern of small medallions in an Oriental style with red and yellow borders. The runner survives on the second and third floor hall and landings, but has been replaced by rubber stair treads on the stairs themselves.

#### Wallpapers

Original wallpapers survive on all of the museum floors with the exception of the family stairhall. In the entrance hall, the walls are covered with an expensive "Japan" paper, richly embossed with a Renaissance scroll design colored in gold on a white (or off-white) background. This appears on the first and second floors of the front stair hall. The paper probably dates from the late 1880s or early 1890s renovations, shortly after such paper began to be exported from Japan.

The dining room wallpaper, dating from the late 19th century, was a brilliant metallic gold, now tarnished, with a machine-printed image of fine fabric netting made with an engraved cylinder, giving the paper the effect of a gold cloth on the walls. Several small pieces of untarnished paper are in a drawer of a dining room sideboard.

On the walls of the second floor library, a wallpaper or wall canvas with a burlap texture is covered with gold paint. Charles Gibson Jr. wrote that this room had a blue wallpaper originally, and he advocated that the blue pattern be restored when the room was next repapered. He did not indicate when the present paper was hung, but it is undoubtedly from the 1890s.

A more delicate wallpaper in the music room has a yellow neo-classical stripe and floral design on a pale rose ground that has a ribbon emboss and a light coating of mica, machine printed, creating an impression of silk wall hanging. The wallpaper is documented as part of the 1890 renovations of the music room.

In the third floor study, is a red damask design wallpaper with a wood-block print pattern. As is common with red wallpapers, the color has greatly faded where it is exposed to sunlight.

The third floor bedroom has a paper with machine-printed thin stripes on a mica-coated background in two tones of beige, with the walls bordered with a block-printed multiple colored floral border framing each wall like large panels. This paper appears to date from the early 1890s renovation of the bedroom.

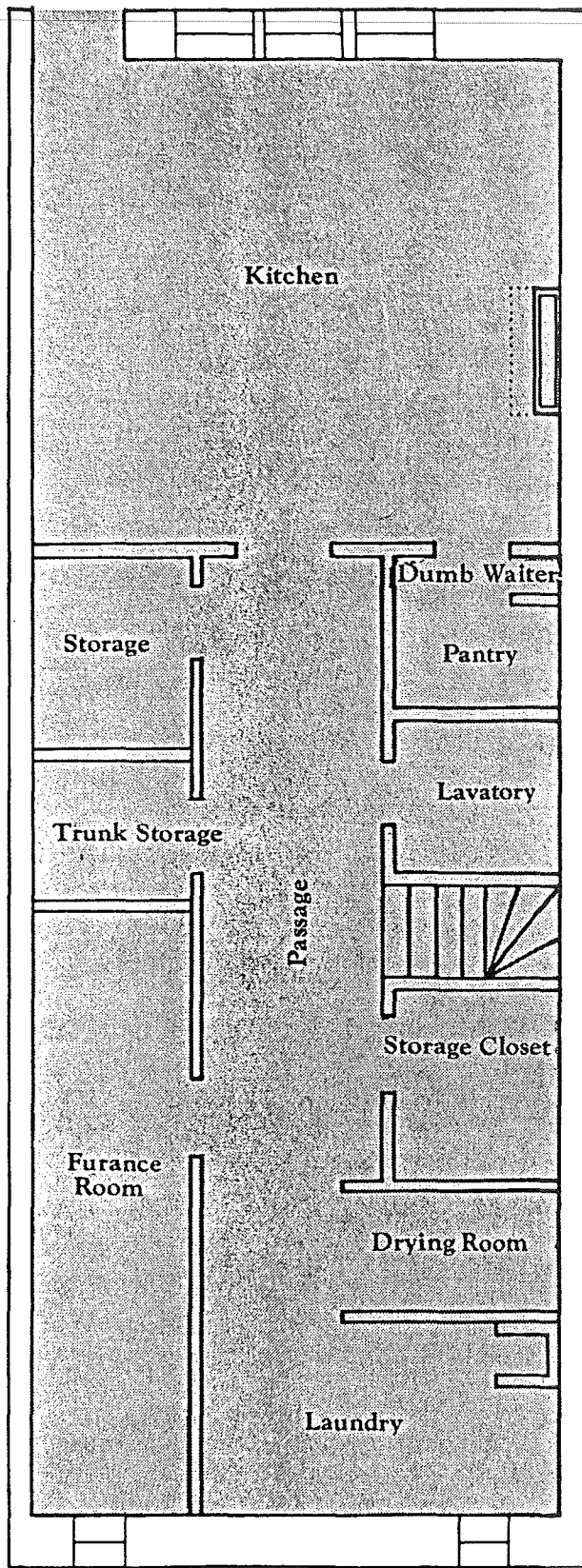
Only on the walls of the family stairhall has a newer wallpaper been hung by the museum committee. In a sepia coloring with cobalt accents, the large foliage design is a machine print manufactured in the 1960s but printed from Victorian rollers.

An important document of an earlier pattern may survive in an enclosed cupboard under the stairway between the second and third floor. The walls of this cupboard have what appears to have been the original 1859 stairway wallpaper, a small grey and white geometric pattern of a style typical to c. 1860; it is trimmed with a small greenish-blue and brown foliage border. It is perhaps the only remaining example on the walls of the original 1859 decorations of the house and is much more chaste than the richly patterned and gilded papers of the 1890s. Still, even the 1890s papers at Gibson House exhibit elegant restraint compared to the more flamboyant papers being manufactured during the same decade, and, like the carpets, they appear to have been selected as subtly rich backdrops for the paintings and furnishings of the Gibson family.

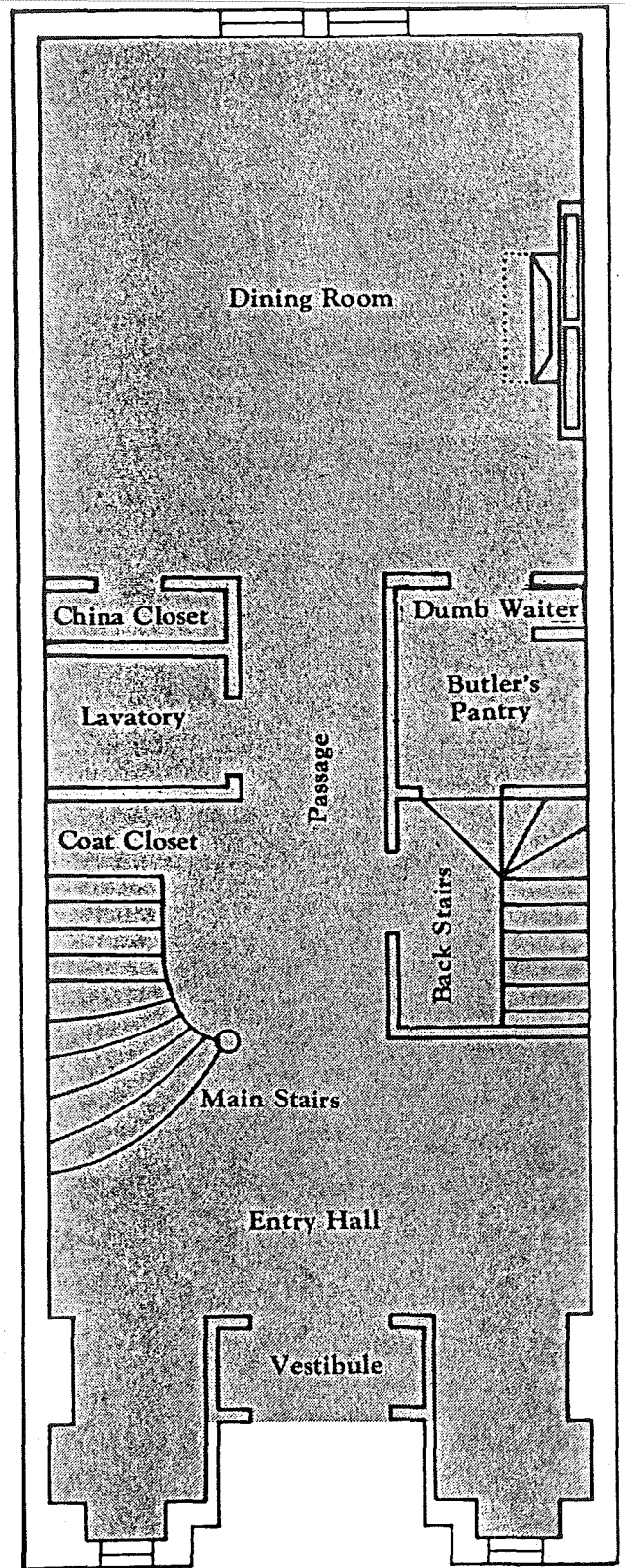
### 2.3 Photographs & Plans:

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs and plans are from A Study Report of the Gibson House Museum, by Catherine L. Sieberling, 1991.

All photos from 1990-1991, unless otherwise noted.

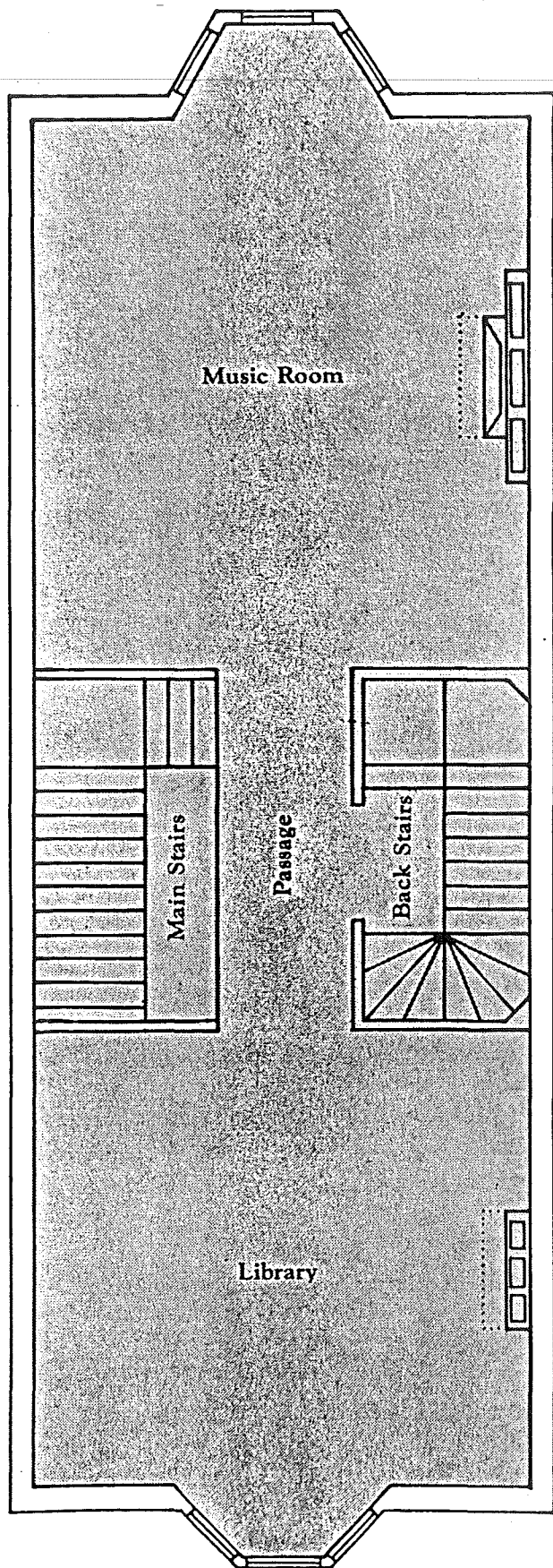


Ground Floor Plan



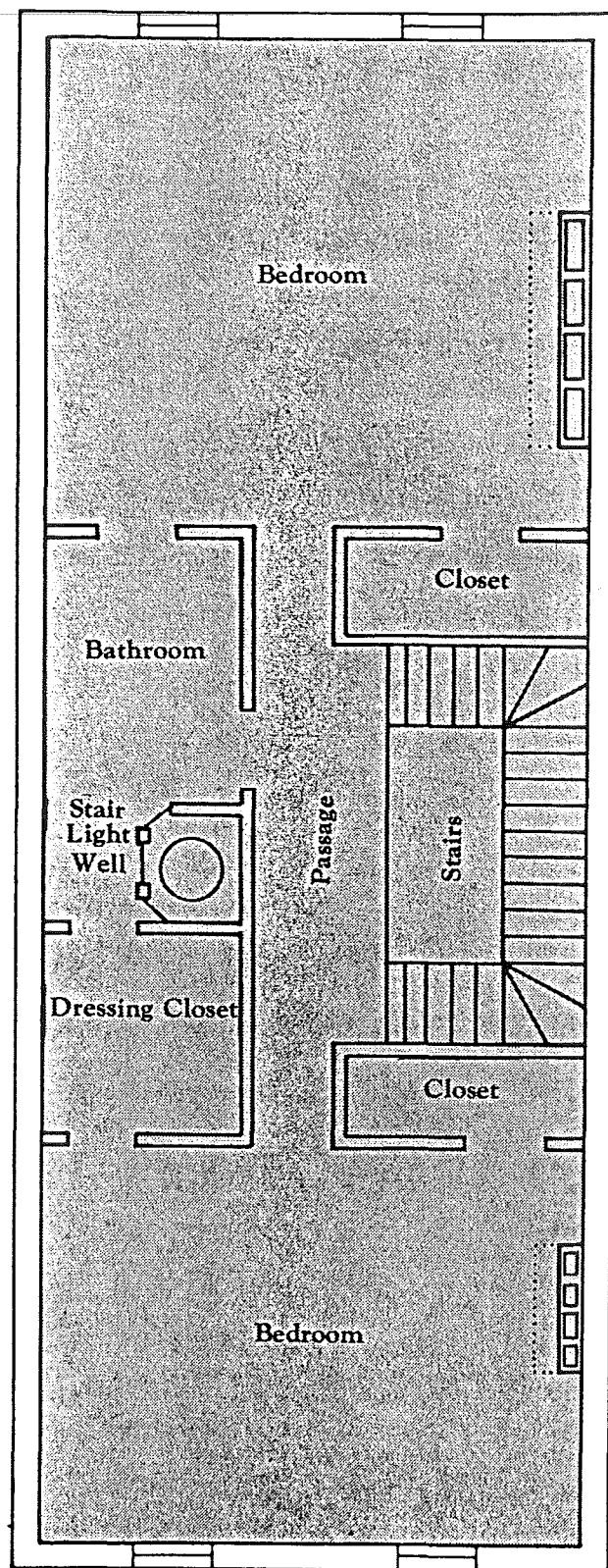
First Floor Plan

the Gibson House, 137 Beacon Street



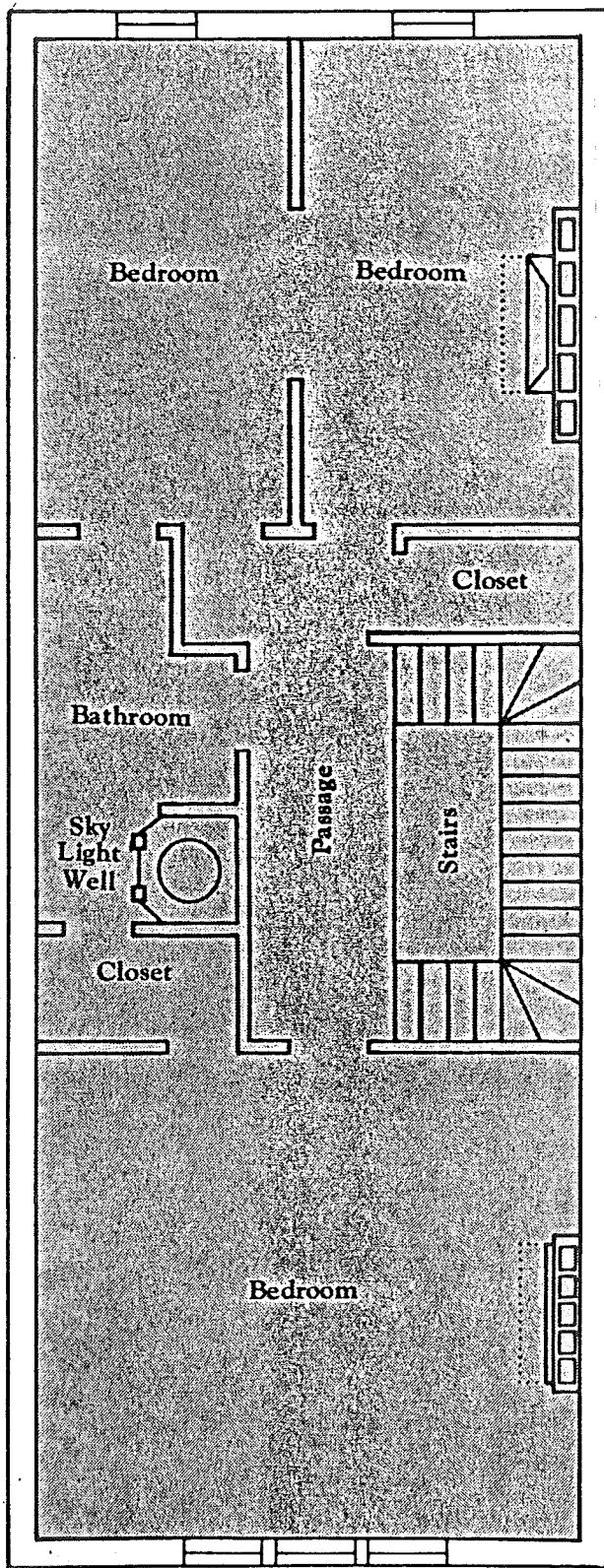
Second Floor Plan

the Gibson House, 137 Beacon Street

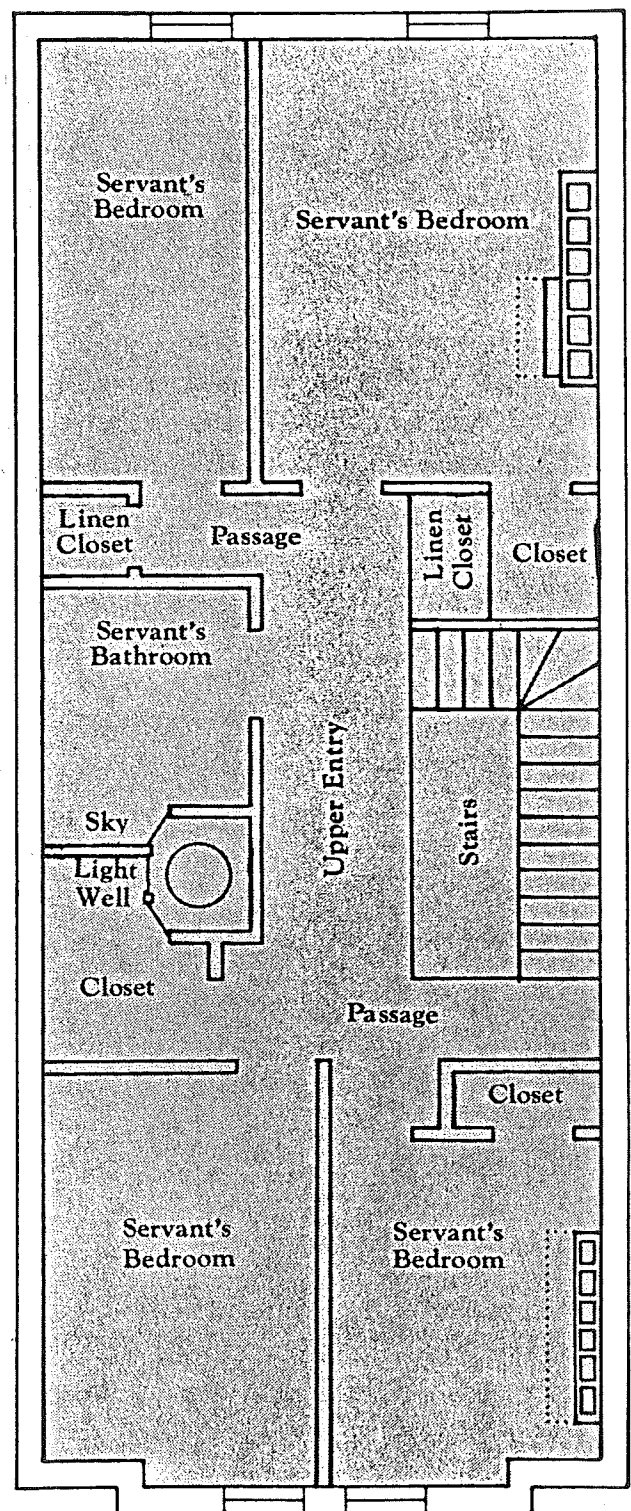


Third Floor Plan





Fourth Floor Plan

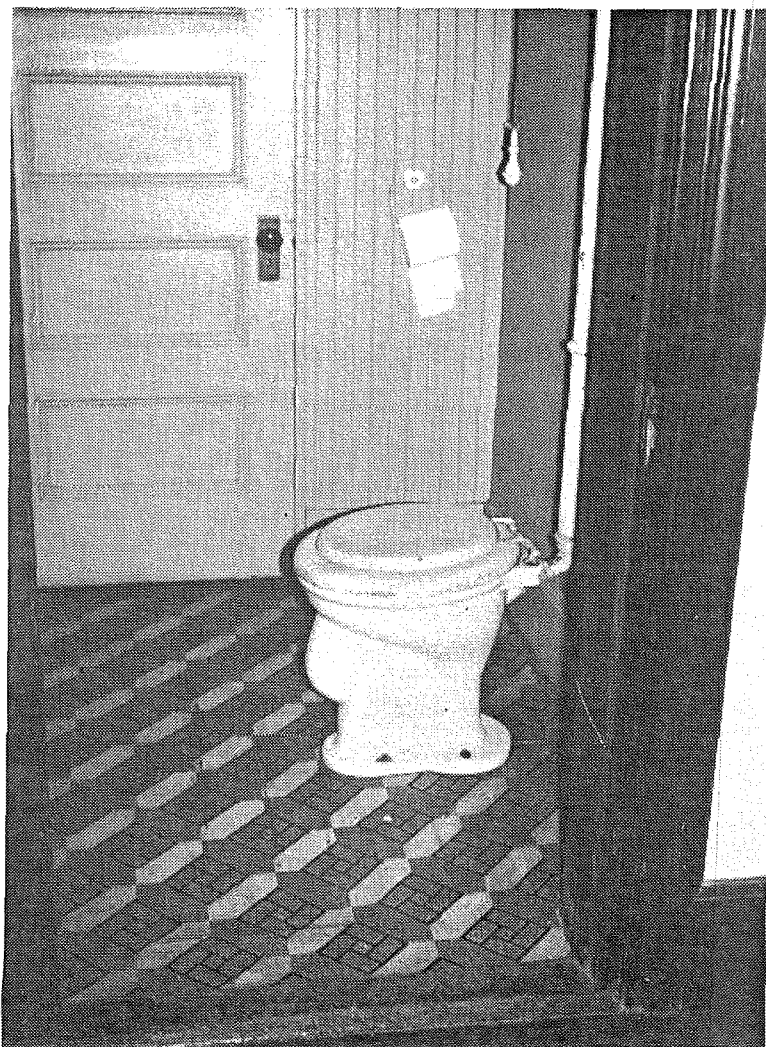


Fifth Floor Plan

the Gibson House, 137 Beacon Street



Original Boiler Tub & Iron Stove in Laundry Room



Servants Lavatory in the Basement with original Water Closet

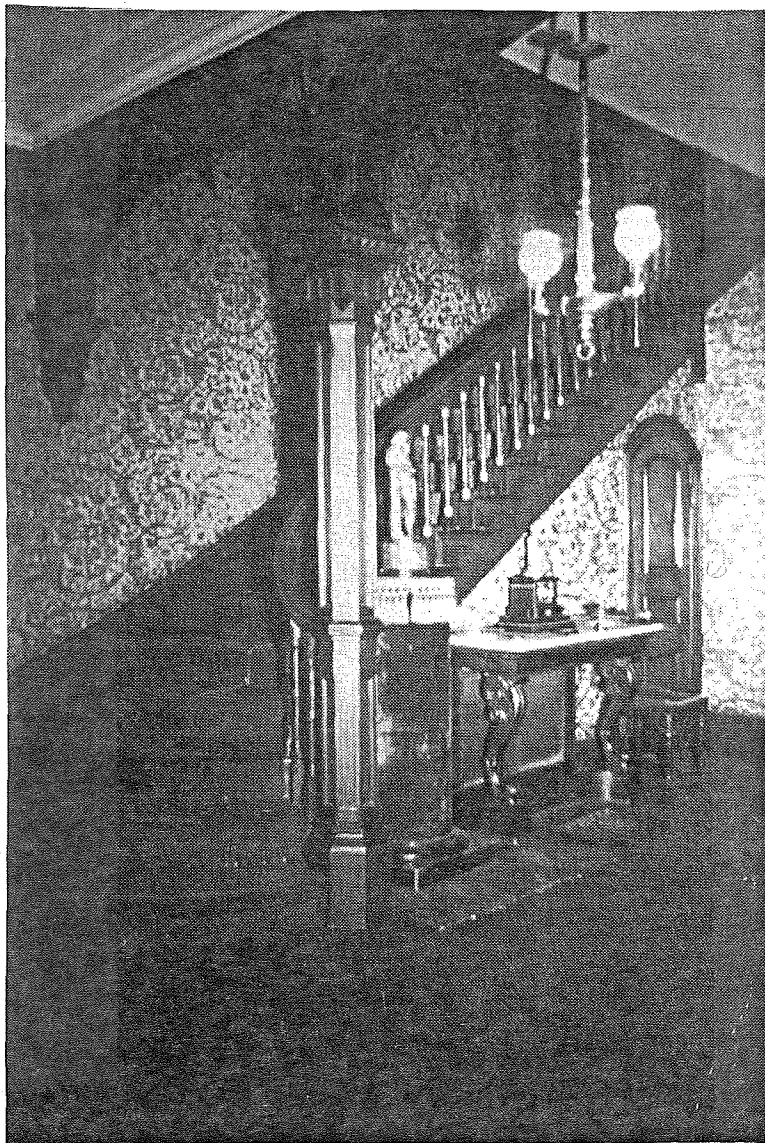


Smith & Anthony Stove, 1884  
(Left)



Rear Courtyard, Adjacent to Kitchen  
BASEMENT (GROUND FLOOR)





Front Stair Hall and  
Grand Staircase (left)



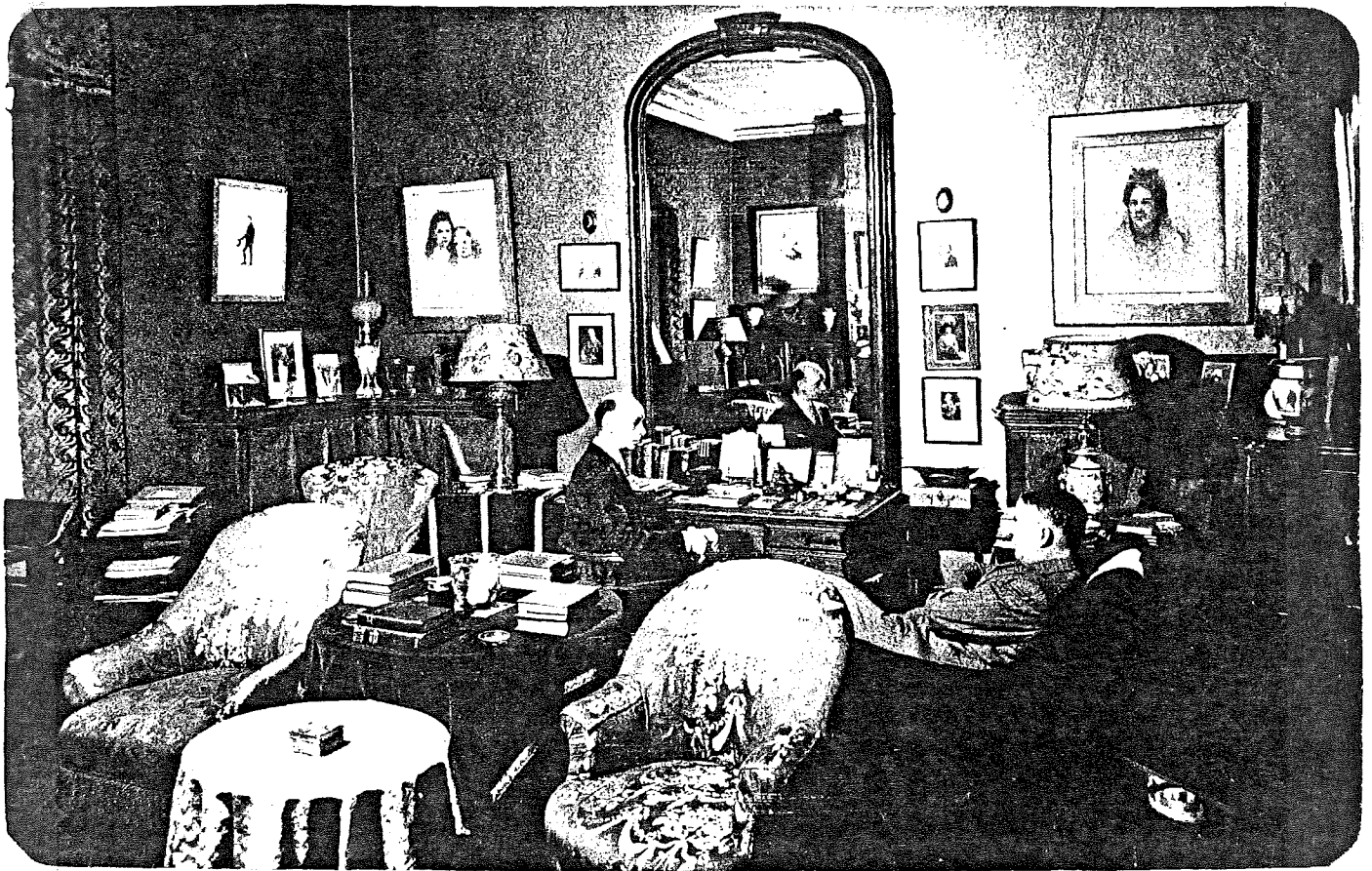
Dining Room (right)

FIRST FLOOR





View of Fireplace in the Library



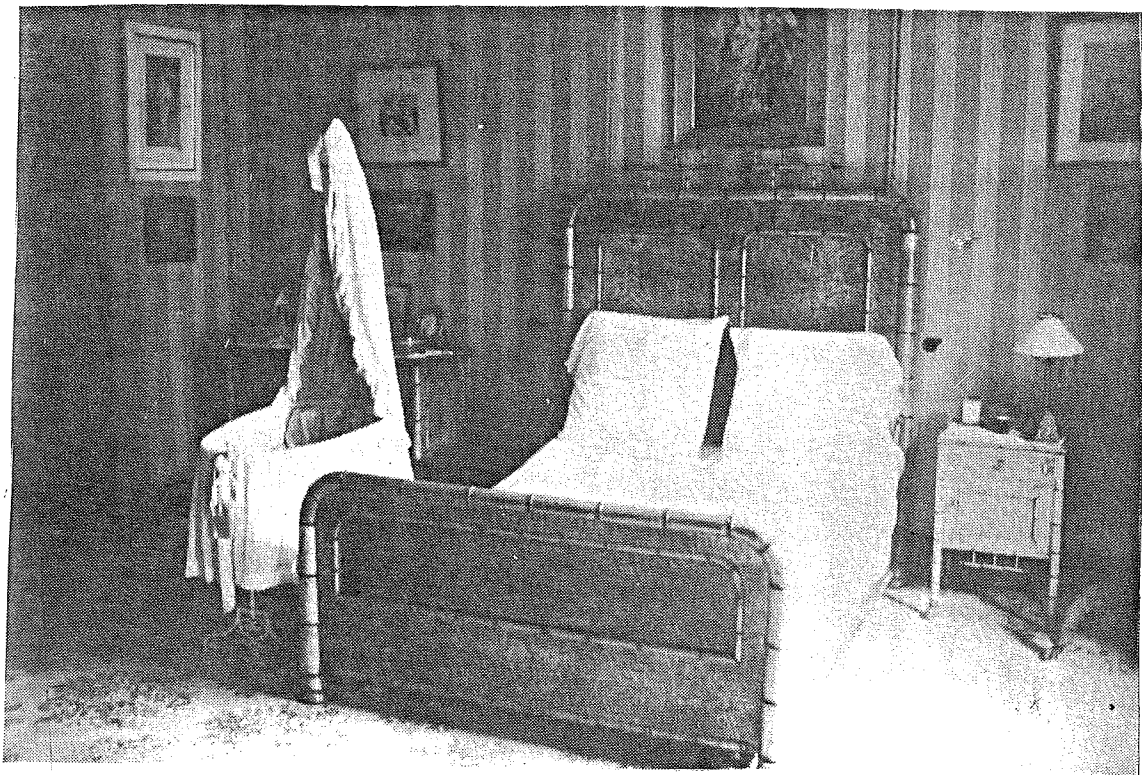
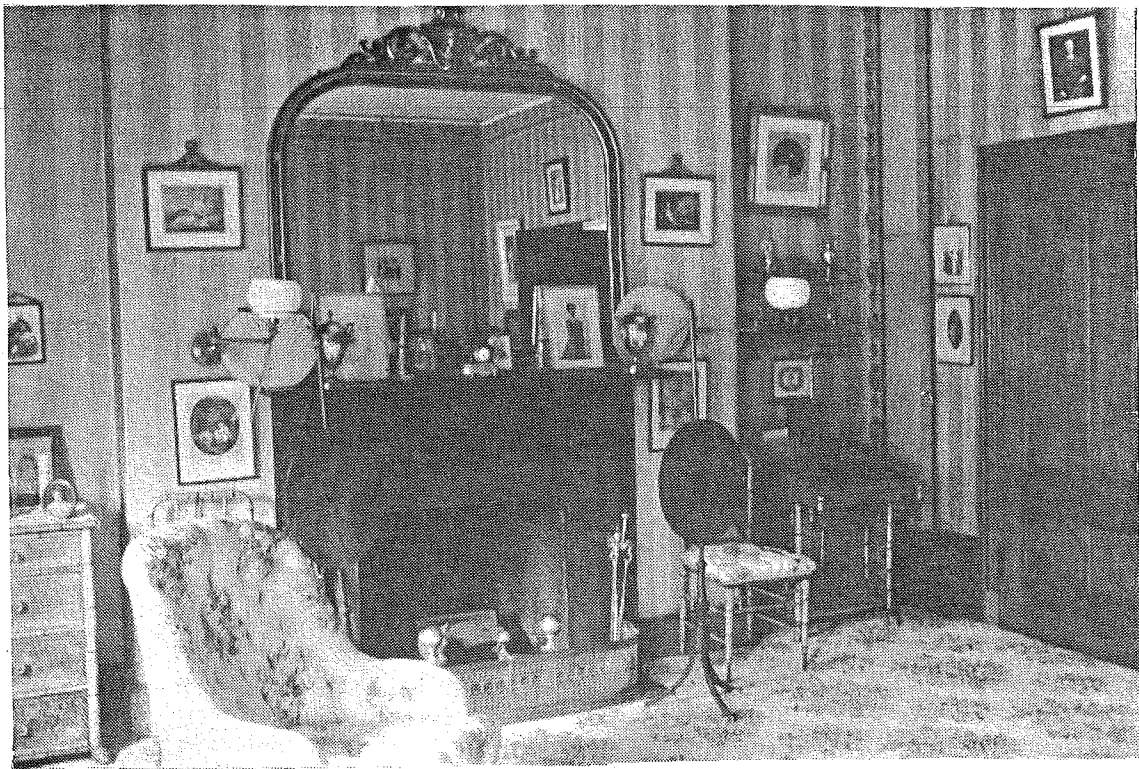
Charles Hammond Gibson, Jr. at home in his library with John Marquand, late 1940. From Life Magazine (March 24, 1941)

SECOND FLOOR



(Top) The Bedroom, pre-1960 renovation  
 (Bottom) View of Study  
 photos from slides by Keller Color, c.1960  
 THIRD FLOOR



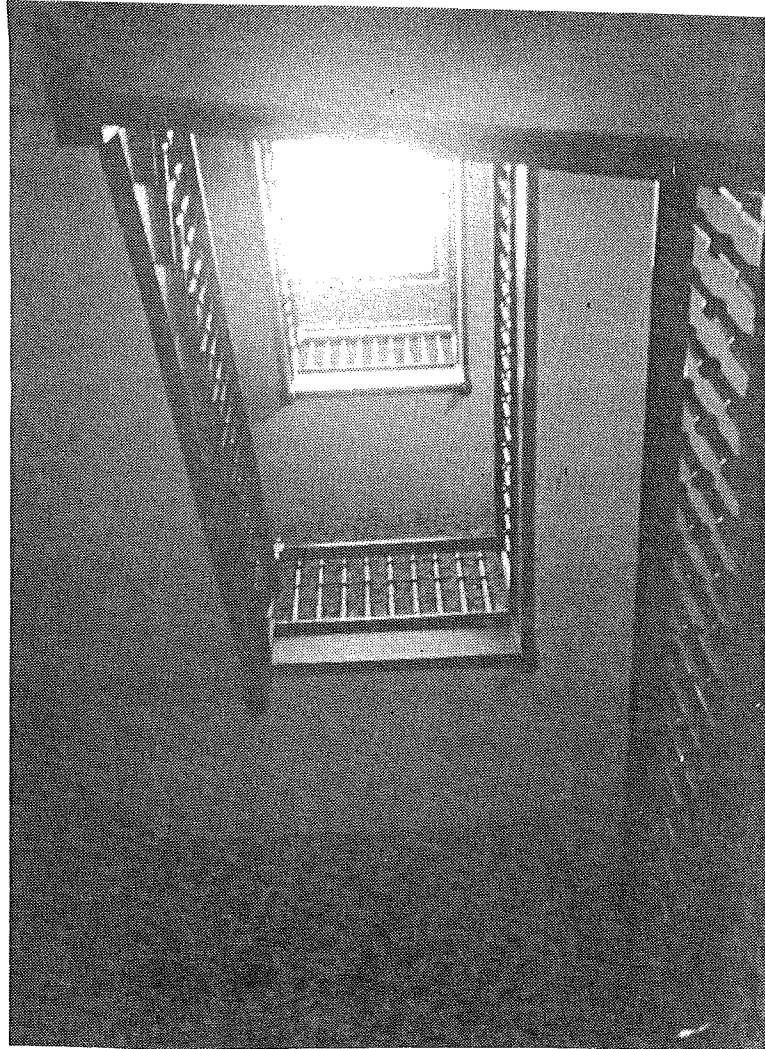
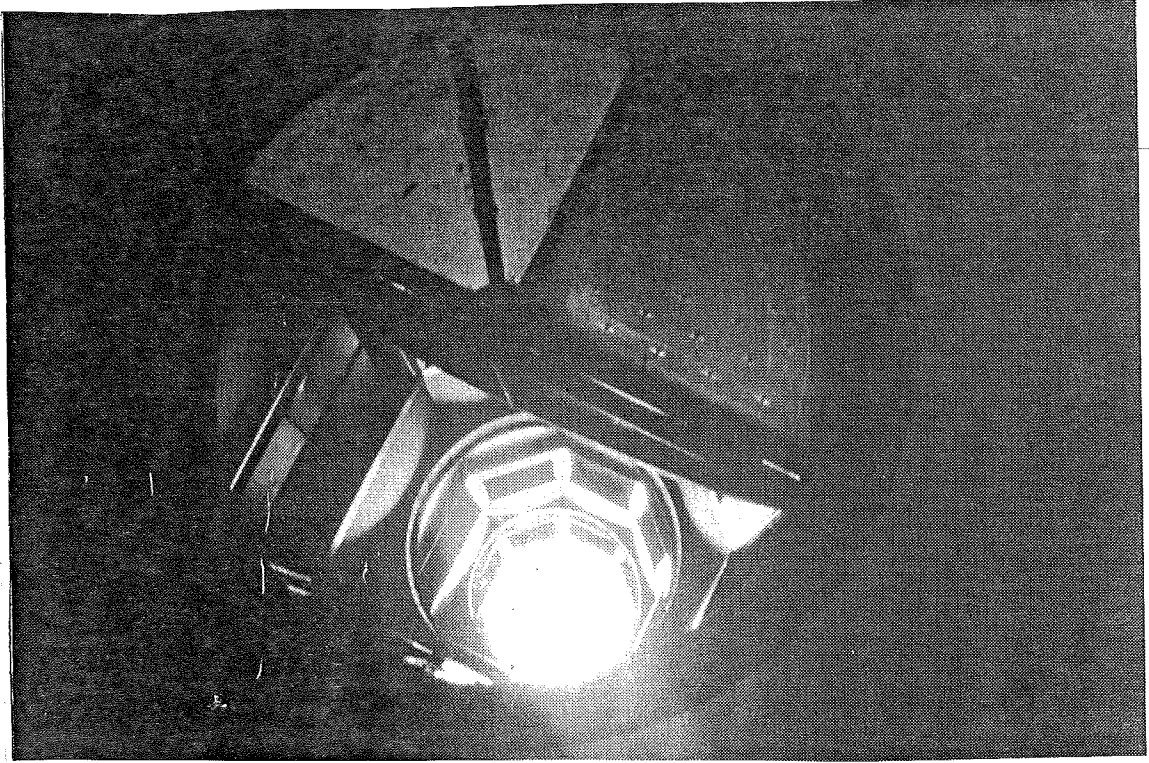


(Top) View of Rear Bedroom  
 (Bottom) Bird's-eye Maple Bed given to Rosamond Warren, (1871)  
 THIRD FLOOR



Third Floor Bathroom

THIRD FLOOR



(Top) Ventilator Shaft as it appears over the Grand Staircase  
(Bottom) Four Floor Span of the Back Staircase



### 3.0 SIGNIFICANCE

The Gibson House is a rare and probably unique surviving example of an intact Back Bay rowhouse interior. The high degree of preservation is evidenced by the integrity of the plan and the survival of most of the interior features, fixtures and furnishings from the 19th century. In addition, the house chronicles the history of a prominent 19th century Boston family and is representative of the Brahmin lifestyle of late 19th century Boston.

#### 3.1 Historical Significance

The Gibson House Museum is the legacy of the farsighted vision of Charles Hammond Gibson, Jr., the grandson of the original owner. As early as the 1930s, Gibson sought to preserve his family home as a Victorian relic and a shrine to his own literary works.

##### Life within the Gibson House

Three generations of the Gibson Family resided at the Gibson House, from 1860 to 1954. The house functioned in much the same way throughout the family's tenure, with only minor changes in the use of some rooms.

Three of the six floors comprised the "public" or family areas of the Gibson House while the remaining three floors were relegated to domestic functions, nursery and servants quarters. The public rooms are typically about 25' x 20' in area with two on each floor - one on the Beacon Street elevation and one on the alley elevation. Presently, four of the six floors at Gibson House are open to the public by guided tour. As intended by Charles Hammond Gibson, Jr., these floors comprise the essence of the Gibson House museum.

The distinction between public and private areas of the Gibson House is not only emphasized by the arrangement of the overall floor plan and individual function of rooms, but in varying quality of materials and attention to decorative architectural detail. The finest detail and quality is on the first two "public" floors, with less detail on the third floor, and utilitarian detail in the basement, fourth and fifth floors. For example, the entry hall and other spaces visible to guests have gold-plated picture rails and black walnut woodwork, while simply detailed oak or pine trim is used on the upper floors. Doorknobs are another example of the distinction between public and private spaces. Mercury glass knobs are used in the formal rooms and family spaces, while black porcelain knobs are used elsewhere.

### Basement

The focus of the basement is the kitchen, where significant remaining elements include the attached stove, cupboards, sink, call bells and dumbwaiter. The basement plan is efficiently adapted to Victorian domestic procedures. There is an ample laundry which is up-to-date for the 1860s, with boiler and adjacent drying room. There are many cupboards and closets for the storage of food, provisions and trunks. Also extant is a servants' lavatory that retains original fixtures. In addition, there is a substantial furnace room where the original (now removed) coal furnace was stoked through a cast-iron door in the hall. Other existing contents of the kitchen and adjoining pantry are largely the early 1960s recreation of Mrs. Marjorie Drake Ross, who in coming to the house as an interested Trustee in 1957 found few, if any kitchen artifacts from the Gibson family eras.

While the interior of the shed has never been altered, the structure was stabilized in 1989 and painted green. The shed area retains its utilitarian appearance as a service entry with access to the back alley adjoining the rear elevations of Marlborough and Beacon Streets. The shed contains several coal bins, one cold pantry, and a storage closet. The various coal bins most likely stored different types of coal used for various purposes. The kitchen stove and furnace would have required larger pieces and greater amounts of coal (probably stored in the large bin which was loaded from the alley), while cannel coal was used for fireplaces (stored in smaller bin). Originally the ice box was in the shed, its location still visible by a sheet of zinc. The cold pantry was probably an early, or additional area for the cold storage of food.

### First Floor

The large, spacious and highly detailed entry hall functioned as a reception area for guests or formal receiving lines. Due to its central entry plan, the house does not have a separate reception room found in narrow rowhouse plans, typically located on the opposite side of the grand staircase. The entry hall furniture, most of which was designed especially for this type of location, attests to the transient use of the space. The small, sturdy chairs, with cupboards beneath for gloves or letters, were designed for brief stays rather than for comfort. The large Elizabethan Revival sideboards, part of a larger suite of furniture at the Gibson House, are more decorative than functional.



The lavatory and butler's pantry retain their original utilitarian appearance. The lavatory does not appear to have its original 1860 fixtures. It is however, elegantly fitted with mahogany toilet seat, lid and tank, as this would have served as a guest lavatory. The pantry, with its oak cupboards and countertops, copper-bottomed sink and dumb-waiter, was designed to service the adjoining dining room with ease and efficiency. A pantry of this kind was a modern addition for a plan dating from 1860. The copper lined sink was intended for washing breakable porcelains, silver and glassware that may not have survived a trip on the dumbwaiter or the narrow stairs to the basement. Verbal communication between servants working on both floors was possible by a speaking tube (original speaker is missing, pipe is extant) near the dumbwaiter shaft.

The dining room has changed very little from its original appearance. The room is situated directly above the kitchen and the food was transported via the dumbwaiter. This room was the location for all family meals, although the children may have had meals served in the nursery. At formal dinners, guests were greeted in the entry hall and often led immediately into the dining room.

#### Second Floor

The decorative scheme of the entry hall and grand staircase is carried to the upper hall with the use of carpet, wallpaper, Elizabethan Revival furniture and black walnut woodwork. The back staircase, which begins on the second floor, provides access to the upper floors.

The family entertained company and conducted business in both the library and the music room. These rooms also provided a private retreat for study, music rehearsal or conversation. Large round arch double doors of black walnut separate the rooms from the halls, allowing for privacy. Additionally, portieres divide the spaces providing for privacy, warmth and decoration.

The library was a favored spot for Charles Gibson Sr. It was not unusual at this time to have a home office where a businessman could work and receive guests. A Boston merchant would typically spend the afternoon at home, as the Exchange closed at 2:00 pm. The music room was the location of tea parties and after-dinner musical entertainment.

### Third Floor

The third floor consists of a master bedroom suite that is divided into two large chambers. Unlike the second floor where much space is occupied by the Grand Staircase, here the space between the study and the rear bedroom is occupied by a bathroom and dressing room. These rooms are illuminated and somewhat dominated by the great expanse of the octagonal ventilator shaft. This floor pattern is largely echoed on the fourth and fifth floors, where again the ventilator shaft dominates. The third floor chambers, both originally bedrooms, are separated by a long corridor, but easily and privately reached through the bathroom. It was common practice in the upper middle class homes to have separate master bedrooms, and communication devices between them. One bedroom was converted to a study after 1916.

### Fourth Floor

With the exception of modern kitchens installed in former storage closets, the plan of the upper quarters of the Gibson House has remained intact since the house was occupied by various generations of the Gibson family.

The fourth floor plan includes a large, well-lit chamber to the north and two smaller chambers to the south. As on the third floor, these separate areas were reached through an ample bathroom and dressing area. The ceiling height is the same on the third floor; ceilings of both floors are slightly lower than the first and second floors. It is known that this floor was the nursery for the Gibson children, but it is also probable that Charles Hammond Gibson, Sr. and his new bride Rosamond would have occupied the front chamber after their marriage in 1871 until Catherine Gibson's death in 1888.

### Fifth Floor

This floor is one of the most interesting and unique spaces in the Gibson House. It is here that servants slept and performed numerous household tasks in the open area of the hallway. The children may have also played on this level. Rosamond Gibson mentions in her memoirs that the fifth floor landing was the location of the Warren dollhouse. The higher than normal banister railing, approximately 3.5 feet, along the fifth floor hallway, with a wide wooden grille placed above the rungs, was designed to protect children from falling. An abundance of closets and built-in storage space was primarily intended to store family linens and other items since the house had not attic.

### Gibson Family History and Tenure at 137 Beacon Street

Catherine Hammond Gibson (1804-1888), the original owner, resided at the Gibson House from its completion in 1859 until her death in 1888. Her son, Charles Hammond Gibson Sr. (1836-1916) lived there from the time he was twenty-four until his death. Charles Gibson brought his bride, Rosamond Warren Gibson (1846-1934) to the home in 1871, after their wedding. Charles and Rosamond's children - Mary Ethel (1873-1938), Charles Hammond Jr. (1874-1954) and Rosamond (1878-1953) - were the third generation to grow up in the home. Mary Ethel and Rosamond married in 1911 and 1916 respectively, and moved out of the Gibson House. Only Charles Hammond Gibson Jr., a life-long bachelor, stayed in the house, living there until his death in 1954. It was after his mother's death in 1934 that he undertook earnest efforts to transform the family home into a museum.

The following is a brief history of the Gibson Family who occupied the house at 137 Beacon Street from 1859 to 1954. In 1833, Catherine Hammond Gibson married John Gardiner Gibson, a sugar merchant. Five years after their marriage, John Gardiner Gibson died at sea en route from Cuba to Europe on the Brig Leander. Catherine Hammond Gibson and her two young sons resided at her parents' house on Somerset Place for the next twenty years.

The Gibson's had two sons, John Gardiner Gibson, Jr. (1835-1856) and Charles Hammond Gibson. John Gardiner Gibson died tragically at the age of twenty-one when the steamer Lyonnais sank in New York Harbor with all aboard. Charles Hammond Gibson was educated at Phillips Exeter Academy.

Catherine Gibson's nephew, Samuel Hammond Russell (1823-1894) managed the Hammond estate house where Catherine Gibson lived with her sons. In 1859, after the death of her Mrs. Gibson's mother, Samuel Hammond Russell sold the Somerset Place home and presumably convinced his aunt to move to the Back Bay. Due to increasing commercialization of older downtown neighborhoods many residents moved to more fashionable neighborhoods such as the Back Bay during this period. Several of Catherine Gibson's relatives moved to the Back Bay including her nephew Samuel Hammond Russell at 135 Beacon Street, her brother, Samuel Hammond across the street at 116 Beacon, and her brother-in-law, Nathaniel Pope Russell at 72 Beacon.

In 1871, Charles Hammond Gibson, Sr. married Rosamond Warren (1846-1934). Rosamond Warren Gibson was the daughter of Dr. Jonathan Mason Warren, a noted Boston Surgeon and Annie Crowninshield Warren, daughter of the Secretary of the Navy under Presidents Monroe and Madison. Rosamond Gibson was a hospital volunteer and is listed in the 1916-1917 City Directory as a "vocal teacher."

After their wedding, the couple lived at 137 Beacon Street with Charles' mother. Charles formed a cotton brokerage business with Charles Joy. Their office was destroyed in the great fire of 1872. After his death in 1916, Charles Hammond Gibson, Sr. was buried at the family plot at Mt. Auburn Cemetery. Rosamond Warren Gibson died at the age of eighty-nine in 1934.

Charles and Rosamond Hammond had three children - Mary Ethel (1873-1938), Charles Jr. (1874-1954), and Rosamond (1878-1953). Charles Hammond Gibson, Jr., the Gibson Society's founder, attended St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire and the MIT School of Architecture. He withdrew from MIT after one year and traveled to Italy, France and England. In London, he assisted the famous newspaper publisher Lord Northcliffe in the preparation of the Jackson-Harnsworth Polar Expedition in 1894. During his tenure as secretary to Lord Northcliffe, Charles did research at the British Museum and in France for his forthcoming book on French rural life, Two Gentlemen in Touraine. Gibson's first published work was a sonnet, printed in a 1894 issue of the Boston Transcript.

In Boston, Gibson established himself as a writer with a studio at 9 Charles Street from 1907-1910. Using the pseudonym Richard Sudbury, Gibson published Two Gentlemen in Touraine in 1899. Gibson's obituary, which he wrote, described the work as "a critical and historical study of the Royal Chateaux of France and one of the standard works on this subject."

Gibson's second book, Among French Inns, was published in 1907. Gibson wrote until the year of his death, publishing several volumes of poetry and frequently contributing poems to newspapers. At one time, Gibson was chairman of the poetry committee of the Boston Author's Club. Gibson read his own poetry for a recording on file in Harvard University's Woodberry Collection.

Gibson has never received the acclaim as a poet or author he would have liked. It appears that he received more recognition for his travel books, which can still be found in many public and private libraries. In addition to his career as a writer, Gibson was a volunteer member of the Boston Parks and Recreation Commission in the 1910s, where he played a controversial role in a beautification scheme for Boston Common. Gibson actively promoted his ideas for a "Convenience Station" in 1915-16, ultimately built, but not quite to his specifications. The building stands today as an octagonal structure of pink granite designed in the Beaux Arts style. Gibson's vision was to construct a replica of the Petit Trianon at Versailles.

Gibson's antiquarian interests are well documented, but it is unclear how the idea evolved of turning his family home into a museum. Gibson's lifelong passion for the past was established early in his life and later intensified as he witnessed profound changes in Boston at the turn of the century.

Gibson seems to have been viewed in his day as somewhat of an eccentric. On one hand, Gibson was a conservative and romantic man, whose values and tastes seemed entrenched in the 19th century. Yet, on the other hand, his lifestyle was flamboyant and somewhat unorthodox for the period.

#### Formation of the Gibson Society

Letters to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, dating from the 1930s, indicate that Gibson hoped to bequeath the fully furnished house to SPNEA. However, SPNEA was not interested, as illustrated in a letter from Thomas Frothingham to William Sumner Appleton:

The members of the committee are convinced that it would be a great mistake for our Society to maintain this house as a memorial to Mr. Gibson and his family. He has his own organization and it is more suitable that his should maintain the memorial.

On May 13, 1938, the Board of Trustees of SPNEA voted not to accept Gibson's gift. Gibson formed the Gibson Society in 1936 to serve as a promotional vehicle to discuss and publish his poetry as well as to preserve the Gibson House as a Victorian House Museum. Six of Gibson's acquaintances signed the "Agreement of Association" and became founding members of the society. According to the agreement, the society's functions were:

For historical, educational and literary purposes, and in particular to acquire and preserve for the benefit of the citizens of Boston, Massachusetts, as it shall be existing when so acquired, together with its furnishings, collections of objects of artistic and literary interest and value, antiques and manuscripts, to which the public may have access.

There is not a great deal known about the original Gibson Society and the location of its records is unknown. Charles Hammond died on November 17, 1954, four days before his eightieth birthday. Gibson's obituary states in part:

Charles Hammond Gibson, poet and horticulturist, who delighted in being designated as a 'proper Bostonian,' whose friends have included Mrs. Jack Gardiner, members of the Court Circle of London and Newport society leaders, and whose Boston and Nahant homes were period museums for years from the Victorian Era until today died Wednesday (November 17, 1954) after a brief illness.... Mr. Gibson died in his home at 137 Beacon Street, where he was born and had lived most of his life and which was called Gibson House.

#### Early Museum History

Several years after Gibson's death, efforts continued to establish a "Victorian House Museum," according to the provisions of Gibson's will. A board was reconstructed to lead the Gibson Society. A museum committee was established and a curator appointed. The Gibson Society is structured in such a way as to act independently of the Gibson House if need be, as one of the purposes of the Gibson Society is to read promote and publish the poetry of Charles Hammond Gibson, Jr.

Although Gibson died in 1954, the museum did not officially open until 1957. From the 1950s through the 1980s, there was an attempt by the Board to acquire Victorian furnishings. Existing photodocumentation from the early history of the Gibson House Museum reveals that objects and furniture have been rearranged, recovered or replaced in some instances without exactly duplicating the original appearance. It appears that a comprehensive policy has not been followed in the interpretation of the house museum.

### 3.2 Architectural Significance:

The Gibson House, significant for its 19th century Victorian interior which has remained intact and relatively unchanged, is especially noteworthy for the amount of detail preserved. Character-defining components of this interior include the original six-floor plan, the decorative scheme, original fixtures, systems and fittings, and some family furnishings. The Gibson House appears to be the only intact, single family Victorian interior remaining in the Back Bay.

While the nineteenth century exteriors of Victorian dwellings are preserved throughout the city of Boston, few interior plans or intact details remain to the extent found in the Gibson House. Within the past thirty years, the interior of the Gibson House has become a truly unique remnant of its period.

#### Construction of 135-137 Beacon Street

Deed research indicates that the state deeded a large parcel of Beacon Street property to William W. Goddard and T. Bigelow Lawrence on August 1, 1857. A portion of this property was subsequently sold to speculator John L. Gardiner, husband of Isabella Stewart Gardiner, and eventually to Samuel Hammond Russell and Catherine Hammond Gibson on September 1, 1859. Mrs Gibson's paid \$3,969 for the property.

The Gibson House's architectural twin at 135 Beacon Street is credited as "the first one erected on Beacon Street below the Public Garden." (Obit. of Hammond...) It seems likely that the Gibson House, at 137 Beacon Street, was built simultaneously or soon thereafter.

Due to their 1859-1860 date, it is fair to speculate that the Gibson and Russell houses were among the very first Back Bay rowhouses constructed south of the mill dam. The central entry plan, utilized in these two structures, is rare in the Back Bay. Cabot's design for the Gibson House was likely the first in Back Bay to use this plan, although there were soon others.

Bainbridge Bunting describes the relationship between the two structures at 135-137 Beacon Street:

It should be emphasized that duplication of design motifs was not necessarily the result of economy. Two instances can be cited where paired facades appear to have been the result of a deliberate aesthetic choice on the part of the owners. The houses at 135-137 Beacon Street were built in 1860 by related families, the Russells and the Gibson's. The interiors of the two houses vary considerably for the main staircase of number 135 carries to the top of the house, while in 137 it only goes to the second floor. There is a difference also in the arrangement of the bedrooms on the fourth floors as evidenced by their fenestration,

and the wood trim in the parlors and libraries are not identical. It is obvious that the architect, E.C. Cabot, prepared separate plans for these two houses and that 135 was considerably more expensive to build. Yet the facades of these houses are almost identical, the only difference being the three-window arrangement on the top floor at 137 as opposed to the two-window scheme of 135.

The Gibson House is designed in the French Academic Style. The French Academic style became the predominant style for Back Bay rowhouses through the 1860s and 70s. The symmetrical facade is restrained in its use of ornament. Bunting describes the entrance as being the focal point of a facade that is executed in a symmetrical and "correctly detailed" style, following classic, architectonic principles with no superfluous ornament. The use of a symmetrical facade is unusual, as it results in wasted space on the interior. It is seldom used in Back Bay rowhouses of standard width.

#### Edward Clarke Cabot

Edward Clarke Cabot (1818-1901) was born in Boston, the third of eleven children. Cabot attended private schools in Boston and Brookline, but never received any formal architectural training. Cabot ran a sheep farming operation in Illinois and Vermont from 1835 to 1845. Upon his return to Boston, Cabot was employed as a draftsman in the office of George M. Dexter. In 1845, Cabot submitted plans in a competition for the new Boston Athenaeum on Beacon Street and was awarded the commission with the proviso that Dexter, a civil engineer and experienced architect, work as the supervising architect.

Following the completion of the building in 1847, Cabot established his own office in Boston. A major work of Cabot's was the old Boston Theatre on Washington Street. The theatre held over 3000 and was the largest in the city. Cabot spent a year in Europe, researching theatre design, in preparation for the commission.

Cabot served in the Civil War, as a lieutenant-colonel of the 44th Massachusetts Infantry. After the war, Cabot re-opened an office in Boston. Much of his work involved public buildings including the Wayland Public Library and the Russell Library at Plymouth. Cabot and his partners designed a number of private homes in Boston and suburban homes in New England in the picturesque rural style.

In partnership with Francis Chandler, Cabot designed many buildings including the John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore and fifteen Back Bay rowhouses. Cabot later formed a partnership with two of his former draftsmen, Arthur G. Everett and Samuel W. Mead.



The firm of Cabot, Everett and Mead are known to have designed two buildings in Boston's Central Business District, 232-236 Congress Street and the Journal Building at 262-268 Washington Street, and the First Unitarian Church at 189 Chestnut Hill Avenue in Brighton. Cabot retired from practice at the age of seventy.

Although primary sources linking Cabot to the design of 135 & 137 Beacon Street have not been found, the houses have been attributed to Cabot in newspaper accounts, biographical dictionaries and an account of an interview with Charles Hammond Gibson, Jr. An article in the May 25, 1860 edition of the Boston Daily Evening Transcript alludes to the fact that these houses were most likely designed by Cabot.

On the Beacon Street side four houses are nearly roofed in, intended for Messrs. Russell, Hammond, Hooper and Otis respectively... The designs of two of the house last named were furnished by Edward C. Cabot, Esq., who also has the superintendence of Mr. Ward's house on Central Avenue.

Mr. Ward's house, referenced in the Transcript article, has certain architectural features similar to 135-137 Beacon Street, especially the treatment on the fourth and fifth floors.

The Gibson, Russell and Ward houses are most likely the first Cabot designed in the Back Bay, and the only ones designed by Cabot while in solo practice. Later, in his partnership with Chandler, the firm designed a number of Back Bay townhouses including

1879:	12 Fairfield Street
	178, 276 and 312 Marlborough Street
1880:	135, 370 Marlborough Street
1882:	166 Beacon Street
1883:	223 Commonwealth Avenue
	195 and 245 Marlborough Street
1884:	247 Newbury Street
1885:	283-285 Beacon Street
	401 Marlborough Street
1886:	410 Beacon Street

### Status of Interior Preservation

Some documentary evidence exists regarding alterations and redecorating schemes throughout the Gibson family tenure and since 1954. Inventories of the Music Room and Library prepared by Charles Hammond Gibson, Jr. in 1938 evidence changes made during the Gibson family tenure. These inventories make clear that substantial changes occurred during 1890, two years after Catherine Hammond Gibson's death.

Rosamond Gibson's memoirs also provide certain clues about interior changes. Photographs taken of Charles Hammond Gibson Jr. with author John Marquand in 1940, for an article appearing in Life Magazine show rooms as Gibson had them. These photos are valuable documentary evidence showing the house's appearance in the 1940s and likely into the 1950s. More recently, particularly in the 1980s, additional structural and cosmetic alterations have been made.

Based on documentary evidence, the following sections outline the significant changes that have occurred within the Gibson House. While most of the changes are decorative and not part of the fixed, interior structure, they nonetheless contribute to the evolution and chronology of the surviving, historic interior and are therefore significant.

### Basement

In the kitchen, the soapstone sink was moved from the south to the west wall in the early 1960s. The original coal furnace was replaced by an oil furnace and a modern gas hot water heater. The laundry room survives intact. Modern appliances, partially hidden by a dividing wall, were added for the resident staff. A window was cut into the side wall of the drying room in the 1960s, for viewing inside during museum tours.

Based on recommendations from a 1981 historic structures report by Sara B. Chase, from the consulting services of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, the kitchen, hall and pantry floors were taken up, relaid and stained in 1982-83. At this time, the walls of these rooms were painted a cream color, although they were originally light green.

### First Floor

No documented alterations exist at this level, although the lavatory was most likely remodelled and updated during the extensive 1890s renovations. There is speculation that the carpet and "Japan Paper" in the hallway were installed during this period.

### Second Floor

The music room underwent a major renovation in the 1890s at the hand of Rosamond Warren Gibson. While little is known of the room's original appearance, it is clear that the room was changed significantly during this renovation. One major alteration was the painting (in white) of the black walnut woodwork, and some furnishings including a table and two mirrors. In addition, white lincrusta wainscotting was installed and a hardwood floor was laid down. The white marble mantelpiece is most likely original to the room.

### Third Floor

According to c. 1960 photos in the Gibson House collection, the bedroom was substantially renovated in the early 1960s by Mrs. Marjorie Drake and the Gibson Society Board. At the time, replacement chintz fabric for upholstery and drapes was loosely based upon an original fabric sample (c.1890), a piece of which is retained as a footstool cover. New carpeting in a "cabbage rose" pattern replaced the green-diamond wool pattern. This room was most likely re-decorated for the first time in 1890, when the wallpaper and fabric were installed, as well as the green carpet. The wallpaper from the 1890s re-decoration was retained during the 1960s decoration.

### Fourth Floor

In the late 1950s, several connecting closets were essentially gutted, with the exception of several built-in units, to accommodate a kitchen area for the first residential managers. In 1982-83, the bathroom was modernized with new flooring and fixtures. In the 1980s, the decorative schemes have been modified according to resident's tastes, but all unpainted woodwork has remained intact. A green wall-to-wall carpet was installed c. 1975 in the adjoining south rooms.

### Fifth Floor

As the Gibson House Museum has not always used both the Fourth and Fifth floors for staff residents, the two floors have not been changed in the same manner. As on the fourth floor, little of the original woodwork has been painted. Only two rooms retain their "battleship linoleum" flooring (installed after 1878, possibly during the 1890s renovations), like that found in the back hall on the first floor. The linoleum was taken up from the hallway on the fifth floor in the early 1980s. Documented alterations occurred in the early 1980s when the bathroom and kitchen were upgraded (1983 and 1985 respectively). Despite some renovations (new flooring and toilet), a claw-foot bathtub and period sink are still in use in this bathroom.

### Furnishings

It is unclear whether architect, Edward Clarke Cabot played a role on the design of the interior of the Gibson House, although it was common practice for architects to order "fixed furnishings" such as mantelpieces, cupboards and bookshelves for their projects. Regardless of Cabot's role as interior design coordinator, it is clear from certain accounts, dates and attributions that individual pieces of furniture and suites at the Gibson House are original to the family tenure and to exact periods of major decoration and furnishings (such as 1860 and 1871). The interior of the Gibson House is now a composite of family furnishings, some acquired during the family tenure and some inherited. According to the Gibson House Museum Guide Book, "other pieces of furniture and accessories have been added to give a more complete picture of Victorian styles." Furniture in the Gibson House undoubtedly contributes to the significance of the intact period interior..

The furnishings which are the most significant at the Gibson House are of two types: "major case pieces" which appear to have been chosen specifically to their site to match the woodwork; and, "original furniture suites" bought specifically for the house. Also of significance are the Gibson family antiques.

### Furnishings: Family Heirlooms

The decorative scheme of the Gibson House reflects the family's accumulation of furniture over time. Charles Hammond Gibson Jr. attempted to have certain family heirlooms returned to the house. In addition, Gibson and others involved in the early museum effort acquired additional Victorian items. Some family pieces naturally pre-date the house and were either brought with the family in 1860 or inherited at a later date. These include: the Willard clock in the entry hall made for Abraham Gibson; the set of Regency chairs in the dining room; three Sheraton chairs in the music room that came from Samuel Hammond's house on Somerset Street, and the pair of Sheraton pole screens and Empire mirror in the third floor bedroom.

Certain family pieces are recalled fondly by Charles Hammond Gibson Jr. in his 1938 inventory. An 1872 Steinway piano was played by members of the family. Unfortunately, the piano was traded for an 1860 piano during the initial period of museum development. Additionally, Gibson notes the laquered Japanese chest of drawers which were a gift from his uncle, John Collins Warren, M.D. In the library, the red mohair "Sleepy Hollow" armchair was a favorite spot for Gibson, as it had been for his father. The tufted turkish sofa, also of red mohair, was a favorite reading place for Rosamond Warren Gibson.

#### Furnishings: Case Pieces

It is possible that certain pieces of furniture at the Gibson House may have been ordered or even designed to specifications by architect Edward Clarke Cabot. However, it is more likely that Cabot served in the capacity identified by Bainbridge Bunting in Houses of the Back Bay. That is the architect "functioned as little more as the artistic coordinator," with client budget and design specifications delegated to a contractor who could assemble a stock of pre-fabricated furnishings and details. However, certain pieces do reflect Cabot's interior design with their architectonic ornament, black walnut and recessed arched panels.

One example of a piece that appears to have been chosen to match the interior is the black walnut sideboard in the dining room. The design echoes the semi-circular archways and mantelpieces found throughout the house, particularly on the first and second floors. Also similar are two black walnut bookcases that flank the fireplace in the second floor library. Two black walnut bookcases on the third floor landing appear to have been purchased specifically for their location.

#### Furniture Suites

A set of Elizabethan Revival black walnut furniture, featuring clawed feet, is probably original to 1860 and perhaps occupied the music room before Rosamond's mother had it redecorated in 1871. This suite, now distributed throughout the house, includes: a matched pair of cupboards on the second floor hallway; a couch and two chairs tufted in red and gold fabric on the third floor study; a large mirror and several console chests in the entry hall.

The most fully documented furniture in the house is the bird's-eye maple bedroom suite in the third floor bedroom that was a wedding gift to Rosamond Warren Gibson from her mother in 1871. Rosamond describes in her memoirs the complete set of thirteen pieces.

Finally, the basement kitchen and pantry furnishing or fixtures, include a built-in cast iron Smith & Anthony stove, a replacement dating from 1884, built in cupboards and drawers, and a soap-stone sink. The ice box was a later addition, and the majority of the contents of the kitchen have been added during the museum period, including the copper hot water heater. In addition, built-in wardrobes and cupboards can be found throughout the third, fourth and fifth floors.

Some furniture found throughout the house may have originally been in the Gibson's summer house at Nahant, such as the green-painted wicker rocker in the kitchen (and related pieces now in storage), a wicker garden seat in the shed, and the rush seated set of Hitchcock chairs now dispersed throughout the house.

### Significant Fixtures, Systems and Features

The Gibson House was designed with the maximum of efficiency and the most modern conveniences of its day. Innovative systems and features included central, gravity-fed hot air, running water, and five bathrooms and lavatories.

### Ventilation and Heating

Due to the shared party walls necessary for rowhouse construction, it was a constant challenge to bring adequate light and ventilation into Back Bay residences. In the Gibson house, the problem was solved by a substantial ventilator shaft, or light well, that rises from the second floor ceiling above the grand staircase to the roof. At the third through fifth floors, the ventilator shaft is accessed by windows that can be opened from the hallway and bathrooms. Frosted panes of glass in the windows insure privacy and protection from direct sunlight. A large, multi-paned skylight at the ceiling of the fifth floor stairwell also provides sunlight and ventilation.

The ventilator shaft is one of the most interesting and unusual period elements remaining at the Gibson House. During the Victorian era, a ventilator shaft was considered a modern, hygienic way of dealing with coal and gas fumes, helping air to circulate, and providing diffused light in place of direct windows. With the advent of electric lighting, ventilator shafts were no longer necessary for sufficient light. When the city instituted fire codes, ventilator shafts were outlawed. In many instances, the ventilator shafts were converted to closets or elevators were placed within them.

The house is heated by gravity-forced hot air. A coal furnace (now oil) heats the air, which rises through the house through a system of tin-plated steel ducts originating in the furnace room. Original floor registers are found in some locations throughout the house. Some original flues still rise through the staircase; others were removed.

In addition to forced hot air, each room has a fireplace with shallow flues designed to burn cannel coal. The fifth floor does not receive forced hot air from the basement furnace, but it does have two fireplaces. There is evidence that a stove was placed near the stair. Originally, hot water was heated by a water heater connected to the cook stove in the kitchen.

### Lighting

Original gasoliers and chandeliers were removed from every room except the dining and music rooms in the 1890s due to the introduction of electricity and a desire for decentralized lighting. Prior to this period, the entire house was lighted by gas. The transition from gas to electric was simplified by passing electric wires through old gas pipes. This allowed the original gas fixtures to be preserved and converted to electric lights.

Charles Hammond Gibson Jr.'s 1938 inventory of the music room indicates that the crystal chandelier and its sconces came from the home of Mrs. Jonathan Mason Warren, Rosamond's mother, at 63 Commonwealth Avenue, after her death in 1910. Gibson later indicated to Bainbridge Bunting in 1948 that the varied gas wall brackets, fixtures and chandeliers at the Gibson House were from three separate family houses. Chandeliers and lighting fixtures were especially valuable pieces, so it is no suprising that these items would be passed along from home to home.

#### Communication

Because the six story plan made communication difficult, the architect installed the most modern communication systems available. Although the original mechanical call bell system was replaced by electric buzzers, the built-in wiring and the bells themselves remain at many points throughout the house, particularly in the back hallways, on the fifth floor and in the kitchen. It is possible that both systems were used together, depending on the location within the house. The doorbell was also part of the original mechanized system. A mechanical dumbwaiter on a pulley went from the kitchen to the butler's pantry, and included a speaking tube. At some point after 1916, Charles Hammond Gibson Jr. had an electric system installed in the kitchen to ring the third and fourth floors.

#### Lavatories and Bathrooms

Several of the bathrooms in the Gibson House were modernized in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. The basement lavatory retains its original water closet and early linoleum floor. The lavatory on the first floor has a sink and flush toilet with a mahogany seat and tank. This lavatory and those on the third and fourth floors were most likely renovated during Rosamond & Charles Hammond Gibson Sr.'s tenure, possibly during the 1890 renovations.

The third floor bathroom features a toilet with chestnut seat and tank, three built-in cupboards, drawers and storage space, and a marble sink. The fourth floor bathroom has an original built-in cupboard with a modern sink, bathtub and toilet. The fifth floor bathroom retains its original built-in cabinet and tub, but has a modern sink and toilet.

#### Closets

The Gibson House is fully equipped with closets, cupboards and wardrobes on every floor except the second. While certain closets on the fourth and fifth floors have been essentially altered to accommodate kitchens, their dimensions, doors and woodwork have been retained in all locations. Storage closets off the basement hall would have held heavy travel trunks and odd pieces of furniture or hardware. The kitchen pantry and several cold storage bins in the shed held provisions.

There is a small china closet of the dining room and a coat closet underneath the grand staircase. The third floor contains a medium-sized closet for each bedroom, equipped with built-in storage drawers and a pull-out storage area. There is also a walk-through dressing room with a built-in wall unit which is between the bathroom and thr front bedroom.

The fourth and fifth floors contain a great deal of storage space. The fourth floor had a large walk-through storage area with several built-in units, that is now the kitchen. There is a built-in cupboard unit in the rear bedroom and a large walk-in closet off the hall, adjacent to the bedroom door. The fifth floor was the storage space for family linens and seasonal clothes. A large, cedar-lined pull down cabinet is in the hallway across from a walk-in closet with built-in cupboard and drawer unit. At the front, the northeast chamber has a similar corner unit along two walls, while the northwest chamber has a small but substantial closet. At the rear, the southwest chamber has a large walk-in closet while the southeast chamber has a small built-in unit.



### 3.3 Relationship to Landmark Designation Criteria

The definition in Section 2 of Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975, as amended, states that a property must have significance to the city and commonwealth, the region or the nation. After examination and evaluation of the Gibson House, the staff of the Landmarks Commission has concluded that the property does meet this threshold. The Gibson house meets the following criteria, necessary for Landmark designation, found in the Boston Landmarks Commission enabling legislation.

The Gibson House is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, as a contributing building in the Back Bay National Register District, thus meeting the first criterion.

The Gibson House meets the second criterion as a "structure, site, object, man-made or natural... that are identified prominently with, or which best represent some important aspect of the cultural, political, economic, military or social history of the city, the commonwealth, the New England region, or the nation." The Gibson House is predominantly identified with the lives of several noteworthy 19th century Boston families and it is representative of the Brahmin lifestyle of the mid to late 19th century Boston.

The fourth criterion states, in part, that a structure must represent "elements of architectural or landscape design or craftsmanship which embody distinctive characteristics of a type inherently valuable for study of a period, style or method of construction or development or a notable work of an architect...whose work influenced the development of the city, the commonwealth, the New England region or the nation." The interior of the Gibson House meets this criterion as a rare, and perhaps unique, surviving example of an intact Back Bay rowhouse interior in an excellent state of preservation.



#### 4.0 ECONOMIC STATUS

##### 4.1 Assessed Value:

The assessed value of the property \$699,500.

##### 4.2 Current Ownership:

The property is currently owned by Francis Welch Trust. Trustees of the Charles Hammond Memorial Trust are empowered in the will of Gibson to hold, manage and invest Gibson's estate in order to preserve, inter alia, 137 Beacon Street and its contents as a complete example of the period from 1859 to 1900, to be maintained as a museum for the education of the public.

The trustees have the power to expend net annual income for the museum, including paying such sums to the Gibson Society, Inc., a charitable organization created to operate the museum. If there is insufficient trust income, the museum shall be closed and income shall accumulate until such time as the museum can afford to reopen. It appears that both the trustees and the Gibson Society, Inc. have the power to make such a determination.

The trustees are authorized to delegate to the Gibson Society, Inc. any or all of their duties involving the care and management of the museum, upon whatever terms and conditions the trustees deem necessary.

The trustees are further authorized to consult with the Gibson Society, Inc. on matters of literary and artistic nature.

Finally, the trustees are authorized to adopt rules regulating the number of visitors in the museum.



## 5.0 PLANNING CONTEXT

### 5.1 Background:

Several years after Charles Gibson Jr.'s death, efforts continued to establish a Victorian house museum according to the provisions in Gibson's will. The Gibson Society established a Museum Committee and appointed a curator. Though Gibson died in 1954, the museum did not officially open until 1957. From the late 1950s through the early 1980s, there was an attempt made by the Gibson Society to acquire Victorian furnishings. Many period furnishings and objets d'art were collected, enabling the Gibson Society to replace worn objects and fill voids in the collection.

#### Association with Victorian Society

The Gibson House became the headquarters of the New England Chapter of the Victorian Society in America in 1974. The Chapter Board and sub-committee meetings are held in the House. The Victorian Society/New England Chapter co-sponsors an annual Christmas Open House at the Museum, and have participated in other cooperative ventures with the Gibson House Museum.

### 5.2 Current Planning Issues:

The house has been open by guided tour to the public since 1957. Resident guides and managers have been involved with the house in numerous capacities since that time. Financial constraints occur because of Gibson's limited assets and the problems created by the will in receiving charitable donations. While part-time paid administrative staff have been hired only recently, there has never been an actual full-time director empowered to make decisions and report to the Board of Directors. In 1990, the Board hired a part-time house administrator.

In July, 1986, a planning meeting was held at the Gibson House. In addition to the Gibson House Board of Directors, prominent museum and historic preservation professionals gathered to discuss the following issues concerning the future of the Gibson House

1. Should the house be a personal memoir to Mr. Gibson with an emphasis on the Gibson Family.
2. Should the house be preserved as a moment in time exhibiting the lifestyle of a Victorian/Edwardian family. (How it appeared when the family left it)
3. Should the house be continually "upgraded" by the purchase and replacement of existing artifacts to be a Victorian House Museum.
4. Is the house a static "objects" place or is it more a living museum, like Sturbridge Village or Plimouth Plantation.

5. Should the house be a Back Bay museum - "a wonderful example of the history of the neighborhood."

The meeting led to a questionnaire for Board members and museum staff and an intensive board meeting in December, 1986. While no long range plan emerged from these discussion, action was taken on several fronts. Since the mid-1980s, the Board has taken a closer look at the goals and methodologies of the Gibson House Museum. Perhaps because of the Charles Hammond Gibson Jr.'s problematic will and the foundation he laid for the Gibson Society in the 1930s, the museum has progressed slowly in its thirty year history. Recently, the will has been reviewed, and attempts are being made to redress some of the difficult provisions so that the museum and its contents are preserved in perpetuity.

While the By-laws are written in such a way that the Gibson Society, essentially formed as a literary organization to oversee and review Gibson's writings, could exist independent of the Gibson House, the commitment is clearly to preserve the entire entity.

Some actions taken in the early years of the museum do not meet current museum standards. For example, a Gibson family piano from 1871 was exchanged for one that dates from the construction period of the Gibson House. However, despite these well-meaning alterations dictated by taste, the essential functional and decorative fixtures still remain from the family's tenure.

In the mid-1980s, visitation to the Gibson House Museum increased by at least 100%. An expanded volunteer guide corps was established in 1988 and a friends group and intern program are currently being organized. For the first time, a non-resident house administrator was hired in June 1990 to serve as a liason to the Board, establish a membership program, initiate fund-raising activities and manage the museum staff and volunteers.

Significant progress has been made in documenting the history of the Gibson House. A cataloguer was hired in 1988 to complete the inventory, record and accession all contents including objects, decorative elements and archives. The process involves a thorough listing and accessioning, with photographs. It is the most thorough attempt to date. In 1989, the Board voted to authorize funding for extensive research, preparation and writing of comprehensive report.

The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing building in the Back Bay National Register District. It is also located within the Back Bay Architectural District. This designation provides that all changes and alterations to the exterior of the Gibson House are regulated by the Back Bay Architectural Commission.

5.3 Relationship to Current Zoning:

The Gibson House is located in an area zoned H3-65. Allowable height is 65 feet, with an FAR of 3. The Interim Planning Overlay District (IPOD) did not propose any changes to the existing underlying zoning.





## 6.0 ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

### 6.1 Alternatives

The Commission has the option of designating the plan, interior features, fixtures and systems. The Commission also has the option of designating interior furnishings.

The Commission could recommend, instead of designation, a preservation easement for the property.

The Commission has the option of not designating the property as a Landmark.

### 6.2 Impact of Alternatives

Landmark designation of the interior under Chapter 772 of the Acts of 1975 as amended, would require the review of interior physical changes in accordance with standards and criteria adopted as part of the designation.

A preservation easement is a recorded, legal agreement between a property owner and another party, usually a non-profit organization or government body which has preservation or conservation purposes among their goals. Such an agreement "runs with the land" and governs the alterations to the property by the current and future owners. It is a vehicle for preserving the architectural integrity of a property by requiring review of proposed alterations to insure that such alterations would not compromise the property's historic character. Easements are voluntary and are essentially private negotiations. Easements may be in perpetuity or for another mutually agreed upon time. The impact of such action would remove any negotiations from the public view.

Failure to designate the building's interior as a Landmark would mean the City could not confer its highest form of recognition of architectural and cultural significance and offer no protection to the structure.



## 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

The staff of the Boston Landmarks Commission recommends that the Gibson House interior be designated as a Boston Landmark. The designation should include the floor plan and affixed character defining features, fixtures and systems.

Specific items to be designated are itemized in the Section 9, the Specific Standards and Criteria, but include: carved mantelpieces; black walnut and stained oak woodwork; etched glass panels on interior doors and windows and interior window shutters; molded Lincrusta wainscotting; plaster ceiling cornices; wallpapers; early linoleum flooring; carpets and rugs; built-in cabinets, drawers, cupboards, closets and wardrobes; mechanized servant call bell system; sinks, lavatories and plumbing hardware; light fixtures; heat registers and ventilator shaft.

The staff does not recommend designation of free standing furnishings or paintings. The furniture and painting collections at the Gibson House are not sufficiently documented, making it difficult to evaluate their relationship to landmark criteria and to determine which pieces are original to the construction of the house or to the Gibson Family tenure. Moreover, since the period of Gibsons' occupancy extended for nearly a century and included a number of discrete redecorating and refurnishing campaigns, the necessity of a comprehensive interpretive plan for the museum rooms cannot be overemphasized. Once such a plan is developed, and supported by a catalogue of all museum items, the designation may be amended to include certain items of furniture within the house.



## 8.0 GENERAL STANDARDS & CRITERIA

### 8.1 Introductory Statement on Standards and Criteria to be used in Evaluating Applications for Certificates

Per sections 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 of the enabling statute (Chapter 772 of the Acts of the 1975 of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts) Standards and Criteria must be adopted for each Landmark Designation which shall be applied by the Commission in evaluating proposed changes to the property. Before a Certificate of Design Approval or Certificate of Exemption can be issued for such changes, the changes must be reviewed by the Commission with regard to their conformance to the purposes of the statute.

The Standards and Criteria established thus note those features which must be conserved and/or enhanced to maintain the viability of the Landmark Designation.

The intent of these guidelines is to help local officials, designers, and individual property owners to identify the characteristics that have led to designation, and thus to identify the limitation to the changes that can be made to them. It should be emphasized that conformance to the Standards and Criteria alone does not necessarily insure approval, nor are they absolute, but any request for variance from them must demonstrate the reasons for, and advantages gained by, such variance. The Commission's Certificate of Design Approval is only granted after careful review of each application and public hearing, in accordance with the statute.

As intended by the statute a wide variety of buildings and features are included within the area open to Landmark Designation, and an equally wide range exists in the latitude allowed for change. Some properties of truly exceptional architectural and/or historical value will permit only the most minor modifications, while for some others the Commission encourages changes and additions with a contemporary approach, consistent with the properties' existing features and changed uses.

In general, the intent of the Standards and Criteria is to preserve existing qualities that cause designation of a property; however, in some cases they have been so structured as to encourage the removal of additions that have lessened the integrity of the property.

It is recognized that changes will be required in designated properties for a wide variety of reasons, not all of which are under the complete control of the Commission or the owners. Primary examples are:

- (a) Building code conformance and safety requirements.
- (b) Changes necessitated by the introduction of modern mechanical and electrical systems.
- (c) Changes due to proposed new uses of a property.

The response to these requirements may, in some cases, present conflicts with the Standards and Criteria for a particular property. The Commission's evaluation of an application will be based upon the degree to which such changes are in harmony with the character of the property.

In some cases, priorities have been assigned within the Standards and Criteria as an aid to property owners in identifying the most critical design features.

The Standards and Criteria have been divided into two levels: (1) those general ones that are common to almost all landmark designations (subdivided into categories for buildings and landscape features); and (2) those specific ones that apply to each particular property that is designated. In every case the Specific Standard and Criteria for a particular property shall take precedence over the General ones if there is a conflict.



## 8.2 GENERAL STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

### A. APPROACH

1. The design approach to the property should begin with the premise that the features of historical and architectural significance described within the Study Report must be preserved. In general this will minimize the exterior alterations that will be allowed.
2. Changes to the property and its environment which have taken place in the course of time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected. ("Later integral features" shall be the term used to convey this concept.)
3. Deteriorated material or architectural features, whenever possible, should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.
4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of original or later integral features.
5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color texture and other visual qualities. The use of imitation replacement materials is generally discouraged.
6. New additions or alterations should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property and should be compatible with the size, scale, color, material and character of the property and its environment.
7. Contemporary design is encouraged for new additions; thus, they must not necessarily be imitative of an earlier style or period.
8. New additions or alterations should be done in such a way that if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property would be unimpaired.
9. Priority shall be given to those portions of the property which are visible from public ways or which it can be reasonably inferred may be in the future.

10. Color will be considered as part of specific standards and criteria that apply to a particular property.

## B. EXTERIOR WALLS

### I. MASONRY

1. Retain whenever possible, original masonry and mortar.
2. Duplicate original mortar in composition, color, texture, joint size, joint profile and method of application.
3. Repair and replace deteriorated masonry with material which matches as closely as possible.
4. When necessary to clean masonry, use gentlest method possible. Do not sandblast. Doing so changes the visual quality of the material and accelerates deterioration. Test patches should always be carried out well in advance of cleaning (including exposure to all seasons if possible).
5. Avoid applying waterproofing or water repellent coating to masonry, unless required to solve a specific problem. Such coatings can accelerate deterioration.
6. In general, do not paint masonry surfaces. Painting masonry surfaces will be considered only when there is documentary evidence that this treatment was used at some point in the history of the property.

### II. NON-MASONRY

1. Retain and repair original or later integral material whenever possible.
2. Retain and repair, when necessary, deteriorated material with material that matches.

## C. ROOFS

1. Preserve the integrity of the original or later integral roof shape.
2. Retain original roof covering whenever possible.
3. Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material which matches the old in composition, size, shape, color, texture, and installation detail.
4. Preserve architectural features which give the roof its character, such as cornices, gutters, iron filligree, cupolas, dormers, brackets.

#### D. WINDOWS AND DOORS

1. Retain original and later integral door and window openings where they exist. Do not enlarge or reduce door and window openings for the purpose of fitting stock window sash or doors, or air conditioners.
2. Whenever possible, repair and retain original or later integral window elements such as sash, lintels, sills, architraves, glass, shutters and other decorations and hardware. When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
3. On some properties consideration will be given to changing from the original window details to other expressions such as to a minimal anonymous treatment by the use of a single light, when consideration of cost, energy conservation or appropriateness override the desire for historical accuracy. In such cases, consideration must be given to the resulting effect on the interior as well as the exterior of the building.

#### E. PORCHES, STEPS AND EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS

1. Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later integral features including such items as railings, balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ironwork, benches, fountains, statues and decorative items.

#### F. SIGNS, MARQUEES AND AWNINGS

1. Signs, marquees and awnings integral to the building ornamentation or architectural detailing shall be retained where necessary.
2. New signs, marquees and awnings shall not detract from the essential form of the building nor obscure its architectural features.
3. New signs, marquees, awnings shall be of a size and material compatible with the building and its current use.
4. Signs, marquees and awnings applied to the building shall be applied in such a way that they could be removed without damaging the building.
5. All signs added to the building shall be part of one system of design, or reflect a design concept appropriate to the communication intent.

6. Lettering forms or typeface will be evaluated for the specific use intended, but generally shall either be contemporary or relate to the period of the building or its later integral features.
7. Lighting of signs will be evaluated for the specific use intended, but generally illumination of a sign shall not dominate illumination of the building.
8. The foregoing notwithstanding, signs are viewed as the most appropriate vehicle for imaginative and creative expression, especially in structures being reused for purpose different from the original, and it is not the Commission's intent to stifle a creative approach to signage.

#### G. PENTHOUSES

1. The objective of preserving the integrity of the original or later integral roof shape shall provide the basic criteria in judging whether a penthouse can be added to a roof. Height of a building, prominence of roof form, and visibility shall govern whether a penthouse will be approved.
2. Minimizing or eliminating the visual impact of the penthouse is the general objective and the following guidelines shall be followed:
  - (a) Location shall be selected where the penthouse is not visible from the street or adjacent buildings; setbacks shall be utilized.
  - (b) Overall height or other dimensions shall be kept to a point where the penthouse is not seen from the street or adjacent buildings.
  - (c) Exterior treatment shall relate to the materials, color and texture of the building or to other materials integral to the period and character of the building, typically used for appendages.
  - (d) Openings in a penthouse shall relate to the building in proportion, type and size of opening, wherever visually apparent.

#### H. LANDSCAPE FEATURES

1. The general intent is to preserve the existing or later integral landscape features that enhance the landmark property.

2. It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the landmark and its new surroundings.
3. The existing landforms of the site shall not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the landmark or site. Additional landforms shall only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the landmark.
4. Original layout and materials of the walks, steps, and paved areas should be maintained. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that better site circulation is necessary and that the alterations will improve this without altering the integrity of the landmark.
5. Existing healthy plant materials should be maintained as long as possible. New plant materials should be added on a schedule that will assure a continuity in the original landscape design and its later adaptations.
6. Maintenance of, removal of, and additions to plant materials should consider maintaining existing vistas of the landmark.

#### I. EXTERIOR LIGHTING

1. There are three aspects of lighting related to the exterior of the building:
  - (a) Lighting fixtures as appurtenances to the building or elements or architectural ornamentation.
  - (b) Quality of illumination on building exterior.
  - (c) Interior lighting as seen from the exterior.
2. Wherever integral to the building, original lighting fixtures shall be retained. Supplementary illumination may be added where appropriate to the current use of the building.
3. New lighting shall conform to any of the following approaches as appropriate to the building and to the current or projected use:

- (a) Accurate representation of the original period, based on physical or documentary evidence.
  - (b) Retention or restoration of fixtures which date from an interim installation and which are considered to be appropriate to the building and use.
  - (c) New lighting fixtures which are contemporary in design and which illuminate the exterior of the building in a way which renders it visible at night and compatible with its environment.
- 4. If a fixture is to be replaced, the new exterior lighting shall be located where intended in the original design. If supplementary lighting is added, the new location shall fulfill the functional intent of the current use without obscuring the building form or architectural detailing.
  - 5. Interior lighting shall only be reviewed when its character has a significant effect on the exterior of the building; that is, when the view of the illuminated fixtures themselves, or the quality and color of the light they produce, is clearly visible through the exterior fenestration.

#### J. REMOVAL OF LATER ADDITIONS AND ALTERATIONS

- 1. Each property will be separately studied to determine if later additions and alterations can, or should, be removed. It is not possible to provide one general guideline.
- 2. Factors that will be considered include:
  - (a) Compatibility with the original property's integrity in scale, materials and character.
  - (b) Historic association with the property.
  - (c) Quality in the design and execution of the addition.
  - (d) Functional usefulness.

## 9.0 SPECIFIC STANDARDS & CRITERIA

The Gibson House, 137 Beacon Street

### 9.1 INTENT

Recognizing both the survival of the Gibson House interiors to the present day, and the probability of their increased importance in the future as the interiors of Back Bay rowhouses continue to be subdivided or otherwise altered, the intent of these guidelines is to preserve the visual character of those portions of the Gibson House interior which remain substantially and demonstrably intact.

The commission encourages continued maintenance of the Gibson House; if any major restoration or construction activity, or work on sensitive or significant features of the interior is considered, the Boston Landmarks Commission recommends that the proponents prepare an historic building conservation study and/or consult a materials conservator early in the planning process.

The proposed designation assumes the significance of existing interior room arrangements and surface treatments, with the exception of known conjectural or revisionist replacements or additions which have been made since the house became a museum. While acknowledging the difficulties in assigning a single interpretive date to a house whose period of significance extends over the nearly one hundred years (1859-1954) of the Gibson family's occupancy, the Commission strongly recommends that the Gibson House organization develop a comprehensive interpretive scheme for the property based on reliable documentary evidence. Although the Commission does not propose to review or approve such a plan, the Commission will determine the appropriateness of future changes or alterations based on their congruity with this plan.

### 9.2 LEVELS OF REVIEW

The Commission has no desire to interfere with the normal maintenance procedures of the Gibson House. In order to provide some guidance for the museum management and the Commission, the activities which might be construed as causing an alteration to the physical character of the interior have been categorized into:

1. Routine activities which are not subject to review by the commission:

Maintenance activities associated with routine housekeeping

Routine activities associated with seasonal installations which do not result in any permanent alterations or attached fixtures

Tenant and storage areas which are not under review, apart from the retention of their general configuration.



2. Activities which may be determined by the Executive Director to be eligible for a Certificate of Exemption: only ordinary maintenance and repair involving no change in design, material, color and outward appearance, including such items as:

Major cleaning programs (including chemical surface cleaning)

In-kind replacement or repair

Maintenance or repair of ceilings

Any alterations to the volumes of the tenant or storage spaces

3. Activities requiring Landmark Commission review: any interior reconstruction, restoration, replacement or alteration or demolition such as:

New construction of any type or removal of any existing features or elements shall require review by the Landmarks Commission. This includes but is not limited to surface treatments, fixtures, and ornaments; or any alteration involving change in design, material, color, location, or outward appearance.

4. Activities not explicitly listed above:  
In the case of any activity not explicitly covered in these Standards and Criteria, the Executive Director shall determine whether an application is required and if so, whether it shall be an application for a Certificate of Design Approval or Certificate of Exemption.

### 9.3 INTERIOR

Included in the designation are:

Basement level: kitchen, laundry and drying rooms, rear shed

Ground floor: vestibule, entry hall, main and service stair halls, dining room,

Second floor: library, music room

Third floor: Bedroom, study

Fourth and fifth floors: General room dimensions, divisions and arrangement

Bathrooms and lavatories served by the above rooms.  
Main and service stairs, stairhalls, and landings as they extend or occur throughout the house.

A Volume:

The full existing volumes and spatial relationships of the designated interior spaces shall be maintained. No subdivision of existing rooms will be allowed. New openings and new framing down or closing of existing openings will not be allowed.

B. Finishes:

All materials and finishes within the designated spaces shall be retained except insofar as their replacement or reinterpretation may be proposed, based on the existence of reliable physical or documentary evidence. In either case, changes shall conform in material, composition, texture and appearance to those existing or established by the interpretive plan. Except as provided above, no existing surface material shall be removed, altered, or covered. Cleaning of interior surfaces shall be completed using the gentlest methods possible.

1. Natural wood elements and surfaces (generally, black walnut in reception rooms, oak in service areas) shall not be disturbed or painted, and if replacement elements or finishes are proposed to remedy the advanced deterioration or accidental destruction of such items, they should match existing elements or established interpretive prototypes.
2. Repainting of designated areas, if proposed, shall be determined by paint seriation studies, to determine original and successive paint colors; further, a panel which represents the existing color scheme must be retained (the sample may be in an inconspicuous location, and of a size that provides adequate evidence of existing treatments).
3. Flooring materials shall be retained. Replacement of carpets, linoleum, or floor boards which may be necessitated by the deterioration or accidental destruction of original elements, should conform to the material, design, finish, and appearance of those existing or established by the interpretive scheme.
4. Wallcovering materials shall be retained. Replacement wallpaper or Lincrusta dado elements which may be necessitated by the deterioration or accidental destruction of original fabric, should conform to the material, design, finish and appearance of those existing or established by the interpretive scheme.

5. All decorative ceiling detail shall be retained. Repairs shall match original in composition, scale, materials, and appearance.
6. Fixed, architectural mirrors (e.g., overmantels) shall be retained. Replacement mirrors which may be necessitated by the deterioration or accidental destruction of original fabric, should conform of the material, design, finish and appearance to those existing or established by the interpretive scheme.
7. Metal surfaces and details (such as picture rails, portiere rods, etc.) shall be retained; if replacement is necessary, changes should match existing in material, design, finish, and appearance or conform to those established in the interpretive plan.
8. Doors, door hardware (including hinges, locksets, and knobs), and door finishes (whether natural, stained, or painted) throughout the house shall be retained as existing and no new doors or openings shall be introduced unless documentary evidence of the prior presence of such features can be established to justify their reinterpretation.
9. Interior shutters of the ground-floor entry hall and dining room windows shall be retained; should replacement elements be necessary, they should match existing in material, design, finish, and appearance or conform to the established interpretive plan.
10. Cabinetwork and wood wainscoting, including cupboard hardware, shall be retained. Any restoration or repair of these elements should match existing in material, design, finish, and appearance or conform to those established in the interpretive plan.
11. Stair railings for both main and service stairs shall be retained. Should balusters, railings, or other elements need replacement, all such changes shall match existing in materials, design, finish, and appearance.

C. Systems:

Visible elements of all active existing systems, as well as visible remnants of such defunct systems as may still be in place, shall be retained, unless otherwise specified within these standards and criteria. These systems may be operated by mechanical, electrical, or other means, and may include, but are not limited to, such items as the cylindrical ventilator shaft, dumbwaiter, servant call bells, kitchen range, laundry equipment including sinks and boilers, register grates, and capped gas brackets, etc., as may be found throughout the house. Should the replacement of such elements be necessary, they should match existing in material, design, finish, and appearance or conform to the established interpretive plan. Removal of any of these items will likewise be determined by the merits of such interpretive evidence.

Additional security equipment, such as alarms and motion detector devices, shall be placed in the most inconspicuous practicable locations, to be reviewed and approved by the Commission.

Any additional systems, such as climate control, which may be required in the future, shall be installed as inconspicuously as possible, subject to Commission review and approval.

D. Lighting Fixtures:

Existing lighting fixtures shall be retained. While the conversion to electricity of any surviving gas fixtures may be allowed, the reconversion of any existing electrical fixtures to gas, as may be deemed appropriate for certain rooms within the overall interpretive scheme, shall not be discouraged. Any required replacement of the metal or glass elements of these lighting fixtures (such as shades) shall match existing in materials, finish, and appearance. Any required supplemental lighting will be subject to Commission review.

E. Plumbing Fixtures:

Plumbing Fixtures shall be retained, including toilets, tubs and washbasins as well as the soapstone kitchen- and copper-lined pantry sinks.



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