

Cohasset Town Hall

Historic Exterior Paint Study

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide three historic exterior color schedules for the Cohasset Town Hall. The general periods of each of the three are:

-c1857-c1880s

c1888 – c1928

c1940s – c1988

The report contains, however, five color schedules. It is based on effort to align some 14-20 layers of paints on trim in various locations with even more layers on clapboards. That is because the trim of this building often seemed to get stripped when the clapboards did not. The most interesting aspect of the paint history of the Cohasset Town Hall exterior is the unmistakable “picking out” (putting a different color on) part of the frieze band of the classical trim ensemble.

That doing so continued from c1880s through at least half of the 20th century is impressive.

Brief General History

1857 construction of present Town Hall

1879 new construction on front – one-story entry, i.e., “mezzanine”

1889 photo showing second story of mezzanine with balustrade at top and striped awning-type roof over the two front doors (“All ready for town meeting, March 4, 1889”)

c1928 added triangular pediment atop mezzanine and removed balustrade;
altered four of the five tall windows on north and south sides, second story, due to putting large auditorium on first floor, instead of second floor.

Extension at east end added at some time in third quarter of 20th century

1988 new addition extending to the south side

Methodology

Historic archival research was limited to a search for earlier photographs and other types of information in the Archives of Historic New England, and the Cohasset Mariner. The single item which was found at HNE was a postcard, of unspecified date (acquired by HNE in 1959). The card suggests it is a 1930s view (although the post mark says 1959). The Mariner had a photo said to be labeled “All ready for Town Meeting, 1889.”

Samples were taken from a lift which gave access to the west and southwest corners of the original building and the c.1928 Colonial Revival enlargement of the front Entry previously referred to as “mezzanine”.

The dates of the building features sampled were confirmed by checking nails of construction, and knowledge of stylistic features of given periods.

Most of the finish paint layers were readily discernible as most had accumulated enough bits of black air pollutants to separate even many layers of whites and off-whites. The trim of course had more layers, as buildings often get the finish paint on the clapboards applied also to the trim. (That way, when the trim is “picked out” with its own color, it has in effect an extra layer of paint protection, in addition to its regular primer. Also, any “holidays” or missed spots are clearly visible.)

The most recent 4-6 paint schemes were simply chalky whites.

PAINT CHRONOLOGY

N.B. “Special trim” refers to the frieze board which backs and holds the brackets. Note that that includes the north and south sides as well as all parts of the western building elements.

I

traces of earliest finish paint found—gloss impossible to tell due to weathering

Clapboards	SW 2834 Birdseye Maple
Trim	SW 2805 Renwick Beige
Sash	SW 9175 Deep Forest Brown (probably gloss)
Shutters	no shutters were available to sample

II

c1880s – c1900s (addition of mezzanine, rear addition)

Clapboards	SW 7029 Agreeable Gray	LRV 60 (very light)
Special Trim (frieze)	SW 7668 March Wind	LRV 49
Trim	SW 2829 Classical White	LRV 76
Sash	SW 9175 Deep Forest Brown (probably)	
Shutters	SW 2847 Roycroft Bottle Green (based on S cellar door)	

III

c1900s-c1920s

Clapboards	SW 7017 Dorian Gray	LRV 39 (medium)
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Special Trim	SW 7017 Dorian Gray	“
Trim	SW 0050 Classic Light Buff	LRV 83 (light)
Sash	SW 6258 Tricorn Black	LRV 3 (dark)

IV

c1928 - ?1930s?

Clapboards	SW 7658 Gray Clouds	LRV 47 (lighter)
Special Trim	SW 7658 Gray Clouds	LRV 47
Trim	SW 7005 Pure White	LRV 84 (light)
Sash	SW 6001 Grayish	LRV 60
Shutters	SW 0041 Dard Hunter Green?	indicated in post card view

V

?late 1930s - 1950s? (Depression, World War II) see postcard

Clapboards SW 0050 Classic Light Buff LRV 83 (light)
(earlier layers seemed warm white; later layers 1950s-60s? appeared chalkier)

Special Trim	SW 7658 Gray Clouds	LRV 47
Trim	SW 0050 Classic Light Buff	
Possibly outlined with soft lead pencil to make it appear more distinct on postcard		
Sash	SW 7006 Extra White	LRV 86 (light)

First floor sash on N and S sides had transoms added.

Shutters indicated on postcard ONLY closed over windows on W exposures.
Benjamin Moore Chrome Green 41 is best match. (It is a real “1940s-1950s” paint.)

Doors:

(a) S elevation beaded matched board cellar door is early; so is cast iron stair rail. It had two distinct paint layers—lowest layer BM Chrome Green 41, then darker green SW 0016 Billiard Green.

(b) suggested finish for the two front doors is a walnut, or mahogany, stain and UV-resistant gloss varnish. A dark finish is historically appropriate.