

CHECK IT OUT: NEW USE FOR FORMER EAST PROVIDENCE LIBRARY

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EAST PROVIDENCE — When it was built in 1905, Rumford’s public library replaced the semi-public library that Samuel W. Bridgham Jr., the son of the first mayor of Providence, had been operating in a wing of his nearby farmhouse.

Today, the new owner of the former Rumford library is turning the one-story brick building at 1392 Pawtucket Ave. into a private home.



The East Providence City Council voted in July to sell the historic building for \$230,000 to Rita Danielle Steele, a lawyer and real-estate broker. Steele is a founding partner and the managing broker of Geo Properties, a real estate agency in Providence’s East Side.

Budget constraints led to the decision to close the library in April 2012. The sale included a deed restriction preventing conversion of the building into commercial space.

According to the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, the library, which has a cross-gable roof, was designed by Hilton & Jackson Architects. A commission report said the building has “a symmetrical classical façade composed in the Beaux-Arts manner but with Colonial Revival details.”

Steele said she aims to preserve the building’s architectural details, as well as most of the bookcases. She is documenting the progress of the renovation with photographs and commentary on her blog, rumfordlibraryproject.com. One entry explains: “If you bought a library, what would you do with the excessive number of bookshelves? Would you remove them, or grow your collection of books? We’re going with the latter.”

Steele said she has a massive book collection, so filling the shelves won’t be a problem.

Every other plan for the 2,900-square-foot house is in place, as well.

The dining room will be in the center of the former library, under a large skylight. The living room will be in the left front section, facing the house from Pawtucket Avenue.

The large space to the right of the front entrance will be the kitchen. Though there will be cabinets, a center island, and a 48-inch gas range, Steele is also planning to install a rolling library ladder in the kitchen, along the row of shelves near the front windows.

The library ladder is one of the many salvaged items Steele has been saving for her “someday” house project. Old doors, reclaimed schoolhouse maple flooring, and antique light fixtures will all have their place in the house. Some items were gathered as part of restoration projects Steele has worked on professionally, while others were found on private antique scouting trips.



Steele is managing the library renovation herself, working with a tight budget of \$74,000. She has a team of volunteer workers, including her father, who is a mason, her sister and her sister’s boyfriend.

Steele’s father will be ensuring that the two wide brick fireplaces in the front section of the building — one in the kitchen, one in the living room — are in good working order.

There will be two bedrooms and two full bathrooms in the back of the former library, in a part of the building that was an addition, and not part of the original structure, Steele said. The back section will have a “loft” feel, with exposed brick walls. An antique clawfoot bathtub will be in a

nook of the master bedroom, near the master bathroom but outside of it, she said.



The sale didn’t close until October, but Steele still hopes to have enough work done to be able to move in by March 15.

“If it takes longer, that’s OK,” she said.