

The Ellen Stone Building, a Greek Revival structure prominently located in Lexington, was built in 1833 as a lyceum hall and residence. It is likely the earliest intact lyceum building in America. It uniquely embodies the national Lyceum Movement, which originated in Massachusetts and swept the country in the 19th century. The Ellen Stone Building hosted prominent speakers including Ralph Waldo Emerson, who served as minister there from 1835-1838 while writing his Transcendentalist manifesto, *Nature*. It was a pivotal center for anti-slavery movements, welcoming abolitionists and suffragists including Charles Sumner, Theodore Parker, Wendell Phillips, and Lucy Stone. The debates within its walls helped shape American democracy in the period preceding the Civil War.

ELLEN STONE BUILDING LEXINGTON



Resource at Risk

Deeded to the Town of Lexington in 1892, the Ellen Stone Building served as a branch library until a flood in 2007 forced its closure. The building has been vacant and unheated for 18 years and status of the fire alarm system is unknown. The building requires significant funding for its preservation and renovation, which has been put off for 18 years. Without a change in status, it is likely to remain shuttered, stagnant, and closed to the public indefinitely, succumbing to demolition by neglect.

What's Happening Now

In 2022, the town's Stone Building Feasibility & Reuse Committee recommended reviving the building as a "modern day Lyceum." The nonprofit Lexington Lyceum Advocates (LLA) is actively pursuing this recommendation with broad community support. Some town funding has been allocated for stabilization and emergency repairs, but all funding directed towards restoration and reopening of the building has been halted.

2026 marks the 200th anniversary of the American Lyceum Movement. It is critical to leverage this anniversary before this building and the Lyceum Movement slip into obscurity. Funding and action are needed to help ensure the legacy of the Ellen Stone Building as a site where democratic discourse is preserved.