

ARCHITECTURAL RESTORATION

The Hidden Treasures of the Carnegie Library at Alfred University

Problem: Damaged interior column capitals that had been covered up for decades
Solution: Recovery and restoration, on time and on budget

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Who knew there was something hidden behind of the walls of Alfred University's Administration Building? Who knew there were beautiful architectural treasures, just waiting in the shadows, ready to be brought out into the light? No one on campus; those treasures had been buried for almost a half century.



Built in the early 1900's, the Carnegie Library Building at Alfred was designed in a mix of early 20th century styles. Still a picturesque structure with remarkable exterior details intact, a renovation in the 1960's rendered the interior into an unimpressive collection of offices. By 2015, the building needed some help; it was time to prepare it for the rest of the 21st century. It was time to update, upgrade, repair, and renew the structure.



The Library

Around the turn of the 20th century, industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie donated more than \$40 million to build over 1,600 new libraries in towns, cities, and universities large and small across America. In 1912, he donated funds for a library at Alfred University.

Founded in 1836, Alfred is one of the first coeducational institutions in the U.S. It's located in the beautiful Allegheny Mountains of western New York, a small private school that specializes in engineering, art, and design.

Until the early 1960's, the Carnegie Library was the hub of academic activity, but over time, it no longer served the needs of its students. The university decided to build a new, more modern library, and turn the old one into administrative offices.

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Scott Hemenway, HBT Architects

And so, the building's architectural treasures were entombed. It served a new purpose for its new occupants, and it did so with a focus on functionality. The soaring main reading area was cut down into individual rooms in the style of the times, with dark paneling and low, dropped ceilings; the original aesthetic was disregarded, and the memory of its beauty was lost.

Discovery

Michael A. Neiderbach, Executive Director, Capital Operations and Legal Affairs, is responsible for all construction on the Alfred Campus. He said, "We had two main goals for the project: one, to optimize the space more efficiently; two, to honor the building's architectural character."

To assist in the project, HBT Architects of Rochester, NY was hired to coordinate the renovation, with Scott Hemenway at the helm.

Neiderbach was on site during demolition and abatement. He said, "We were pulling down the drop ceiling when all of a sudden we saw a beautiful iron column with a complex capital—the new construction from the 1960's just covered them up! It was like uncovering an Egyptian tomb. And we were excited to see what else we would find."

A remarkable amount of architectural detail was discovered. "As part of the renovation, the ceiling had been dropped to standard 8-foot height, and many interior partition walls were built out, which covered up these amazing columns," Hemenway said. "The ceiling also concealed large, high windows which had brought in so much natural light."



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*Michael A. Neiderbach,
Executive Director, Capital/
Operations and Legal Affairs*

Once these features were revealed, the team knew they wanted to recapture the spirit of the original architect's intention and restore the interior to its previous grandeur, but they needed help.



Hemenway said, "In the 1960s renovation, many of the intricate capitals had been damaged, and some were completely destroyed and removed. I knew we needed an expert in architectural restoration, so I contacted Scott Grove. He's a very creative problem solver and I wanted to talk to him about our options," Hemenway said.

The Steward

Grove is a sculptor and multidisciplinary artist; for over thirty years he has used his talents to restore architectural elements on historical buildings in Western New York including The Powers Building, the First Universalist Church, the George Eastman Theater, and many more.

Having worked on buildings that are on the National Register of Historic Places, Grove has a particular sensitivity to these giant antiques; depending upon the age and restrictions placed upon renovation and repair, he matches the needs of the building to the needs of the owners. He works with plaster, wood, composites, and other materials to create these replacements using a range of methods, from traditional plasterwork to the latest high tech materials and techniques.

To repair or replace building ornamentation such as cornices, facades, finials, friezes, gargoyles, and columns with Doric, Corinthian, or Ionic capitals, Grove sometimes takes a mold from an existing piece to create a new one; sometimes sculpts a new master to match an existing piece; and sometimes uses a combination of both.

And when he installs them, they are painted to appear as if they are the original to the building and completely fool the eye. These new pieces are easy to install; they won't rust, decay, or deteriorate; they are lightweight and fire retardant; and they will last many more years than the originals did.

The Process

Grove visited the campus and saw the very ornate, complex, and beautiful Corinthian column capitals with Doric corbels. He said, "These capitals were some of the most elaborate and beautiful that I had ever seen. All of them were damaged in one way or another, and two were completely missing, but I knew I had enough detail to reproduce them in their entirety."

Hemenway said, "Scott tailored his recommendations to the budget that was available, and offered a range of solutions, from simple cosmetic reconstruction to complete replacement. We went with an intermediate choice. This provided for a nice level of restoration at a reasonable price point, which worked within Alfred's budget."

At Alfred, Grove photographed all the capitals, including the damaged ones, and realized that he needed only 180-degrees of one capital to create an entire 360-degree replacement piece. He said, "There was one capital that was in good enough shape to use for a mold, I did a minor hand-sculpting repair and refined some details. I took a flexible, silicone mold on site that captured the high detail and undercuts. I then brought it back to my studio to work under controlled conditions."



On-site mold removal



Final casting

From this original mold, Grove cast two completely new capitals. While reviewing the damaged ones, he documented a list of all the sections he needed to create new capitals, and then cast a few dozen parts to splice into the existing damaged ones.

"It was a complex problem that needed to be solved: I had to work with the old plaster, some of which was damaged from water and physical abuse, and install new pieces that looked original," Grove added. "I consolidated surrounding material, spliced in the new elements, and feathered the components together to make them all look seamless."

Treasures Revealed

Once the capitals were installed, the ceilings lifted, and the room refreshed with new paint and lighting, the main room now has a wide open feel, with high windows on all sides. The impressive interior columns line the walls, each with capitals and brackets, with supporting beams that hold up the ceiling. The results are astounding.

Neiderbach said, "Both Scott Grove and Scott Hemenway helped us to change the mood of the building and recapture its original design. Now it's an elegant, bright space, filled with natural light. When you walk in and see the elegant columns, it's a stunning effect."

Capitalizing on the Capitals

Grove realized the historic value of these pieces and suggested that he could repurpose his molds to create additional half columns and capital pieces. "The largest expense is in making the mold," he said. "Once you have that, you can use it over and over again."

Alfred can now have Grove create wall sconces, plant holders, or other gifts made from the column capitals to present as thank you gifts to donors, faculty, students, and award winners.

"The capitals are such an intrinsic part of the building, it made perfect sense to use the artistry inherent in them as gifts," said Neiderbach. "It's a great idea."

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Michael Neiderbach, Alfred University



About Scott Grove

Scott Grove, sculptor and multidisciplinary craftsman, is a steward of Western New York's historical buildings. He has inspected, restored, reconstructed, and reproduced simple and complex architectural ornamentation from the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries on buildings including The Powers Building, Jonathan Child House, George Eastman Theater, and many more. His work seamlessly replicates existing materials using composites, plaster, wood, and other high tech materials to create replacements that are lightweight, fire retardant, non-corrosive, and long lasting.

Grove has a particular expertise with these giant antiques; understanding the restrictions placed upon renovation and repair, he matches the needs of the building to the budget of the owners.

Specializing in reproducing existing, no-longer-available ornamentation, components, and profiles:

- Inspection and consultation
- Fiberglass casting and layup
- Structural epoxy consolidation
- Onsite mold making
- Plasterwork
- Custom woodworking

Division 5 Metals
5700 Ornamental Metals

Division 12 Furnishings
12100 Art

12140 Sculpture
12900 Furnishings Restoration
and Repair

Division 6 Wood and Plastics
6400 Architectural Woodwork
6600 Plastics Fabrication
6900 Wood and Plastics Restoration
and Cleaning

Division 9 Plaster Restoration
9280 Finishes

Division 10 Specialties
10340 Manufactured Exterior
Specialties
10345 Exterior Specialties
Restoration