

Extreme Makeover

At 113, T-Hall is feeling its age

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It all began with a crack in a window—one of two arched windows that gaze down at Main Street like large eyes beneath granite eyebrows in the red brick face of Thompson Hall. This particular window looks out from the office of the president in the university's oldest brick building on the highest point of land on campus. Within months of being repaired, however, the crack had reappeared. Again, it was repaired. Again, it reappeared.

Closer inspection revealed that slippage in the granite lintel above the window was creating pressure on the pane of glass. The crack, it seemed, was a symptom of a larger ailment, and there were other symptoms as well—like deteriorating turrets and crumbling mortar. In 1996, UNH project manager Brenda Whitmore '81, '02G began studying the condition and history of the structure. An engineering consulting firm placed survey markers on the exterior walls of the building; these revealed that the wall facing Dimond Library was moving slowly but inexorably outward. The rafter "tails" had decayed, and the roof was pushing on the turrets.



Mounting evidence that T-Hall—the very symbol of UNH—was in trouble, both on the surface and in its bones, led Whitmore to initiate the building's first major structural and

exterior renovation since its completion in 1893. In 2004, Goody Clancy, a Boston architectural firm, and Shawmut Construction were chosen to handle the \$5.3 million project, based on their preservation experience. Meanwhile stopgap measures, like snow fence wrapped around the turrets and bracing rods inside the arched windows, were holding the building together—and preventing bricks from falling on passersby.

When Lisa Howe, Goody Clancy's director of preservation, first laid eyes on T-Hall, the only UNH building listed on the National Register of Historic Places, she cringed. She was delighted to be working on a building with so much character and many unique features, like the mottled brown-and-white turret bricks that amazed an international convention of masonry experts. (Dubbed "cow" bricks, they were formed by pressing together two distinct clay bodies.)

But there was something wrong with the windows, and it had nothing to do with a tendency to crack. With their white sash and trim, the windows stood out against the background of red brick and reddish mortar. Standing out, however, is exactly what a window in a Richardsonian Romanesque building is not supposed to do.



H. H. Richardson, who designed many civic and industrial buildings in the 1870s and '80s, was the most influential American architect of the period. He was heavily influenced by the architecture of medieval European monasteries and churches built between 1000 and 1200, a style that reminded later observers of ancient Roman architecture and hence was labeled "Romanesque."

It was natural for Dow & Randlett, the Concord, N.H., firm that won the commission for designing Thompson Hall, to choose this popular style of design in 1892. But according

to UNH architectural historian David Andrew, the Richardsonian Romanesque style was a good fit for another, more important reason.

Named for the university's founding benefactor, Benjamin Thompson, Thompson Hall has been home to labs, recitation rooms, a gymnasium, the radio-station transmitter and many offices over the years. Its bell has awakened and hastened generations of students. It has pealed for joy after victory on the football field and in war. Nicknamed T-Hall at least as far back as 1919, it is the sort of building known as Old Main on college campuses across the country. In other words, it's not just a building, it's an archetype. "T-Hall is UNH," says Whitmore.

That's why it is fitting that Thompson Hall was built in a style harking back to the medieval monastery. "The concept of a university is a medieval invention," says Andrew, "created by monks, who were the educated people of the day." The Richardsonian Romanesque style features massive walls (four to six layers of bricks deep in T-Hall), rounded arches and rusticated materials like rough-faced granite with beveled edges. This style, he says, gives the building "a sense of permanence and durability. It says you really mean business." With its clock tower, cruciform layout and six stained-glass windows, T-Hall was designed as a sort of cathedral of learning. (The stained-glass windows, long since removed, may soon be re-created if the right donor steps forward.)

In short, Andrew has nothing but good things to say about T-Hall. But he does agree that something went awry in the 1920s, when the university decided to use white window trim on all its brick buildings. That's a perfectly acceptable choice for Georgian-style buildings like Hamilton Smith and Murkland Hall, he notes. But white trim is "contradictory to the style of T-Hall," which requires warm earth tones everywhere and windows that blend in to the massive structure instead of popping out visually.

The construction phase of the project began in March, when T-Hall virtually disappeared behind a full complement of scaffolding and a green veil of scrim. At any given time, there have been roughly 50 workers swarming around the exterior of the building—drilling, sanding, hammering, and applying fresh mortar. A crane was used to install new laminated "glulams" and steel beams side by side with the 113-year-old wood ones.

The structural work was designed to reverse the effects of weathering, aging and years of deferred maintenance, while also addressing some original design flaws and subsequent modifications that had weakened the rafters' ability to support a roof bearing 16 tons of slate.



Although the \$5.3 million price tag has raised a few eyebrows on campus, the project is "absolutely critical to the future of the building," according to Whitmore. She also expects the work to improve the energy efficiency of the building and the comfort of its 90 occupants.

Since the new construction is expected to hold for another 50 to 100 years, many decisions about materials were guided by a life-cycle analysis. Fortunately the most economical choice has often coincided with the best aesthetic choice. It made no sense, for example, to mix new slate shingles with a life expectancy of up to 100 years with old shingles that might last less than another 30 years.

When T-Hall is unveiled in November, says Whitmore, "it will be presented to the town of Durham and the university as it was when it was finished in 1893." The weathervane re-gilded; clock and bell restored; copper turret caps, copings, valleys and ridges replaced; brickwork repointed and repaired. There is one instance where the restoration team has improved upon an aesthetic choice made in 1892, however. Consultants dug into crevices in the window trim for samples of the original paint and performed a microscopic color analysis. They found that the frames were painted, in Whitmore's words, "black and a really ugly battleship gray."

No one wanted to replicate the original color scheme, and yet everyone agreed that white was wrong. A reddish-brown paint turned out to be just the color.

UNH's grand dame has been revealing her new look in a bit of a striptease since July, when the top of the tower was first uncovered, followed by the west elevation. Passersby seem to have a positive impression but when asked are often hard pressed to identify what has changed. Eating lunch in the Murkland courtyard one day, research scientist Bradley Crannell squints up at the building. "Is it the copper?" he asks.

He is informed that the windows are now reddish brown instead of white. What does he think? He thinks his wife would be amused to hear that he was being consulted on anything to do with color, since he practically needs her advice to get dressed in the morning. "She's even made up mnemonics to help me remember, like 'Khaki with khaki is tacky,'" he says, with a laugh. Still he ventures an opinion: The new color is definitely

more classy. As an engineer, he adds, he absolutely supports the structural work that should keep T-Hall going strong for at least another 113 years.~

Tales of the Tower

Alums recall their misadventures, mishaps and mischief associated with UNH's tallest building

From Hunter Hall, we had a splendid view of the blue light in the T-Hall tower that the campus police used to rally their forces whenever something was amiss. My roommate and I had a similar blue light which could be seen from the quad and from the ladies' dorm across the way. This was in the mid-'60s, and such things as panty raids actually occurred, which the administration felt merited a response from the UNH constables. When we were made aware of an impending "soirée," we would watch for the T-Hall light and activate ours simultaneously, warning the miscreants that a visit from the authorities was imminent. —**Brian L. Mitchell '66**

I was a "bell ringer" during '69-'70. There was a small stipend, and the only stipulation was that the ringer was to play "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" during the first snowfall. My repertoire consisted mainly of selections from the "Oxford Book of Carols" and Beatles music ("We All Live in a Yellow Submarine"). —**Joel McKay '72**

I was an avid rock climber, as a member and eventually president of the New Hampshire Outing Club. One of the dares was always to "rock climb" up to the bell tower of T-Hall. Now that I am almost 65 years old, it sounds incredibly dangerous, but I did climb up the tower. —**Tommy Dietz '64**

In one of my less glorious moments at UNH, I was out late one evening. 'Twas the school year 1961-62. I was with friends; we attached a bike to the flagpole lanyard in front of T-Hall and hoisted it upwards. Our reward was a front page photo of this spectacle in the next issue of the campus newspaper. —**Anonymous Alumna '69**

Every year, a member of the class gave an address to the student body. My mother, Salome "Sally" Colby '25, was the one chosen for the Class of 1925. A copy of the speech was buried in a hole near the T-Hall arches and ivy was planted with the speech. If the ivy grew, the speech was supposedly a good one. Sally's ivy for the Class of 1925 was planted at the right front corner and it grew. —**Linda Campbell Clark '84**

I have a lovely childhood memory of hearing the bells ring and ring and ring and ring all through that early August evening of 1945 as the end of World War II was declared. —**Dudley Webster Dudley '59**

It was a tradition back in the '50s to ring the T-Hall bells after a UNH football home victory. Since I had many outstanding Theta Chi fraternity brothers that played, several of us nonplaying brothers climbed the stairs and rang the bells after one of our wins during the 1956 season. Different fraternities would race to see who could get there first to ring

the bells. If the lead was big enough, we would run down from the stadium with several minutes to go in order to get there ahead of the others. —**Paul “Cousy” Goyette '58**

One night when we were less than sober at the SAE house, we played a prank on one of our fraternity brothers. We towed his small car to T-Hall and tipped it over on its roof. Needless to say, lots of damage. Of course we got caught. Ben, the only cop in town, convinced the four of us to pay damages, and that was that. I mentioned this to some of my fraternity brothers when we had a reunion in California recently, and we admitted that that was not the only stupid thing we had done in the '55-'59 era.—**Dave “Gus” Gustafson '59**

ALUMNI



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