

News Release

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1874 Building Restored and Rehabilitated on Emory University's Historic Oxford College Campus

OXFORD, Ga., July 19, 2013 – One of the oldest buildings on the historic campus of Oxford College of Emory University has undergone a \$2.2 million transformation inspired by the structure's original interior configuration and Victorian-era exterior. The building has been updated with newly configured classrooms that have cutting-edge teaching technologies, and expanded with an addition to the original footprint to accommodate much-needed faculty offices.

Architecture firm [Lord, Aeck & Sargent](#) (LAS) designed and oversaw the rehabilitation of Language Hall, so named because it originally held classrooms for teaching English, Greek, Latin and modern languages. The project is targeting a minimum of LEED silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, as is the standard for all major Emory projects.

Over the years, Language Hall's interior was cut up and partitioned to meet immediate needs, such as the addition of faculty offices and restrooms where there were none originally. Ceilings were lowered and walls were added, covering up windows and blocking outside light from entering the building. As a result of all this, the HVAC system was compromised, and overall, students and faculty had a diminished learning and working environment.

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“We knew that the configuration of Language Hall compromised its effectiveness, and we could see the potential it had to blend the legacy of the 19th century with learning technology of the 21st century,” said Myra Frady, Oxford College dean for resource planning and chief financial officer. “We are grateful that our partner, Lord, Aeck & Sargent, had the same vision and attentiveness to historic detail as ours.”

Removal of walls, ceilings reveals original floor plan

When LAS began work on Language Hall, an 1874, two-story building with Greek Revival massing and Italianate detailing, its 4,000-square-foot interior was a hodgepodge of small classrooms, awkward faculty offices and makeshift restrooms.

“We didn’t have much to go on in trying to imagine the original interior with the exception of a book¹ written about the history and architecture of Oxford College, and it included a diagram of Language Hall’s first floor in the late 19th century,” said Susan Turner, LAS principal-in-charge of the rehabilitation. “The diagram showed a staircase in the middle of a corridor leading from the rear entry up to the upper level. The corridor was flanked on either side by large symmetrical classrooms. The main front entry included twin doors, each opening into one of the classrooms.”

Although neither floor in the pre-rehabilitation configuration resembled the original plan diagram, removal of added walls and lowered ceilings revealed that the first floor central corridor and stair did exist as shown in the diagram, and that the second floor was similarly arranged. Even though the orientation of the corridor had been changed during the 20th century renovations, the team found portions of the original plaster-covered masonry-bearing corridor walls, which helped in understanding the historic plan configuration.

¹ “Cornerstone and Grove: A Portrait in Architecture and Landscape of Emory’s Birthplace in Oxford, Georgia,” by Erik Oliver. © 2009, Oxford College

Sensitivity to Language Hall's historic character

The College's program included a requirement for four classrooms, a perfect fit for the building's historic plan configuration. However, adaptation of the building to meet today's teaching needs also called for spaces that had never existed within the historic building. To accommodate these programmatic needs and to bring the building up to current codes and standards for comfort and convenience, the team developed a design approach that is organized around the historic central corridor, keeping the remaining remnants of the corridor walls, while also creating a widened area at the front of both floors that serves as lobby and student gathering space. New elements including an elevator, electrical closet, break room and three bathrooms, are all accessed from the central corridor and gathering space.

Debbie Fritz, LAS project manager, noted that the team was sensitive to maintaining the historic character and materials of the interior wherever it could.

"For example," Fritz said, "we discovered original heart pine floors when we removed floor tiles and carpeting. They were in good condition and needed only a light sanding and finish to restore.

"We also had to be creative in designing a forced-air HVAC system. After removing the lowered ceilings, we restored the original 12-foot-high ceilings by designing a soffit in front of each classroom to house the forced air system for supply and return air."

Fritz noted that during earlier renovations the original staircase had been eliminated and replaced by two unattractive egress staircases on either side of the front entrance doors. The LAS team removed these egress stairs and designed an open staircase in the front entry space. This new stair was designed to feel comfortable in a building of this era but is detailed in a simplified manner to set it apart from the historic elements of the building. The stair and second floor reconfiguration required removing floor joists, which were salvaged and used to mill the treads for the staircase.

“The new staircase is really gorgeous and allows you to see all the way up to the ceiling of the building from the ground floor,” Frady said.

Like the original staircase, the original interior doors had been removed during one of the renovations. “Although we couldn’t know for sure what the doors looked like, we designed transoms over the new interior doors because this was typical of Victorian era buildings. The original rear exterior door (with transom) of the building was the example we followed,” Fritz said. “Like the stair, simple contemporary detailing differentiates these new doors from the historic example.”

Exterior rehabilitation

During one of Language Hall’s 20th century renovations, shutters were removed from the windows, and the original double hung windows were replaced with aluminum windows. And since the building was originally heated by pot belly stoves long since disposed of, the chimneys at either end had been removed as well. While a full exterior restoration was not feasible, work was guided by several historic photographs from Emory’s archives as well as by onsite investigation to understand the building’s historic appearance.

The exterior restoration included:

- reconstruction of the chimneys;
- reinstallation of an ornamental wood gable vent that was discovered damaged in the attic and was restored;
- painting of the trim work – including corbels, window hoods, eaves and porch columns – a deep brown in contrast to the lighter off-white color of the exterior; and
- replacement of the windows with replicas of the originals, using aluminum-clad wood painted a dark neutral color to blend with the deep brown and other rich neutral colors selected for the interior.

“The exterior color scheme was selected based upon colors commonly used in the Victorian-era and on the tones and contrast that could be discerned from the historic black and white photographs,” Fritz noted.

LAS also addressed accessibility for the building. “We were delighted to have the opportunity to bring Language Hall to the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act,” Frady said. “We wanted to create equal accessibility to the building while also ensuring that all entrances were aesthetically pleasing. The design and grading of the new side entrance accomplishes that, blending seamlessly with the rest of Language Hall.”

21st century classroom technology

The once-again spacious classrooms are now filled with natural light. Three have moveable tables and chairs and can accommodate up to 33 seats, while the fourth is currently set up as a seminar room with 24 seats. The classrooms are enhanced with back-painted glass boards and podiums powered by SMART Technologies. This gives the instructors capability for free-form writing and interaction with content on a dedicated computer, which is simultaneously displayed on a 125-inch motorized screen.

One of the classrooms is also enhanced with a lecture-capture device that allows instructors to easily record their classroom teaching in both audio and video, using a touch-panel control system. Recorded video can then easily be distributed online for later review by students.

“The building speaks to an ideal classroom environment,” Oxford’s Frady said. “The faculty say they’ve noticed more energy from and attention paid by the students, and they attribute it to the natural light that flows through the building and to more elbow room for the students.”

Frady added that students who attended Oxford College before Language Hall’s

classroom rehabilitation were amazed and eager to be sure they registered for classes held there once the building opened last January.

Addition inspired by a similar historic campus building

The 2,000-square-foot, two-story Language Hall addition houses six faculty offices and ancillary spaces.

“Before designing the addition,” Fritz said, “we looked at Humanities Hall, which is a historic building on campus built in the same year and architectural style as Language Hall. However, Humanities Hall has a cruciform-shaped plan versus the simple rectangular plan of Language Hall. After analyzing the space requirements for Language Hall, it made practical and aesthetic sense to locate the addition at the rear, and to create the same cruciform plan as its sibling building on campus, Humanities Hall.

“We removed a mechanical lean-to from the center back of the building and extended the original floor plan through the addition. The central corridor runs straight through, and there are three faculty offices on the main floor and three upstairs. For the second floor, we extended the central corridor through an old window in the original building. We saved this particular window hood (which can now be viewed from the corridor in the addition), along with the other exterior window hoods.”

Green design strategies and products used

Just as LAS was able to re-use the wooden floor joists in Language Hall's new central staircase, the firm found other ways to re-use materials, one of the project's key green design strategies. For example, granite steps that led up to the back entrance of the old building were displaced by the addition, so they were turned on their ends and used for a sculpture to decorate a garden on the site.

“We determined that the granite steps were originally from Old Main, a building that was torn down in 1872, so in fact they’ve now been used three times,” Frady said.

Other resource-saving products include low-flow plumbing fixtures, a hydration station that encourages use of personal water bottles in lieu of bottled water, and motion-activated lighting.

Project Team

The Language Hall restoration project team included:

- Oxford College of Emory University (Atlanta) - owner
- Lord, Aeck & Sargent (Atlanta office) – architect
- Johnson, Spellman & Associates (Atlanta) – MP/FP engineers
- Barnett Consulting Engineers (Atlanta) – electrical engineers
- Uzun & Case Engineers (Atlanta) – structural engineers
- Eberly & Associates (Atlanta) – civil engineers
- Williamson & Associates (Atlanta office) – waterproofing consultant
- AVYVE(Atlanta) – audio-visual consultant
- Juneau Construction Co. (Atlanta) – construction manager/general contractor

About Lord, Aeck & Sargent

Lord, Aeck & Sargent is an award-winning architectural and planning firm serving clients in academic, historic preservation, scientific, arts and cultural, and multi-family housing and mixed-use markets. The firm’s core values are responsive design, technological expertise and exceptional service. The firm is listed as 28th in *Architect, the Magazine of the American Institute of Architects*’ annual “Architect 50” ranking of U.S. architecture firms. The ranking is based on business, sustainability and design excellence/pro bono. In 2007, Lord, Aeck & Sargent was one of the first architecture firms to adopt [The 2030 Challenge](#), an initiative whose ultimate goal is the design of carbon-neutral buildings, or buildings that use no fossil-fuel greenhouse gas-emitting energy to operate, by the year 2030. Lord, Aeck & Sargent has offices in Ann Arbor, Michigan; Atlanta, Georgia; Austin, Texas; Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Lexington, Kentucky. For more information, visit the firm at www.lordaecksargent.com.

About Oxford College of Emory University

Oxford College is Emory University's distinctive freshman/sophomore college situated on the University's original, historic campus 38 miles east of Atlanta in the city of Oxford, GA. Students who complete the first two years of the Emory bachelor's degree in Oxford's liberal arts intensive program are automatically enrolled as juniors in the Emory College of Arts and Sciences, or they may compete with others to enter Emory's nursing and business schools.

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