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# ILLINOIS

A L U M N I

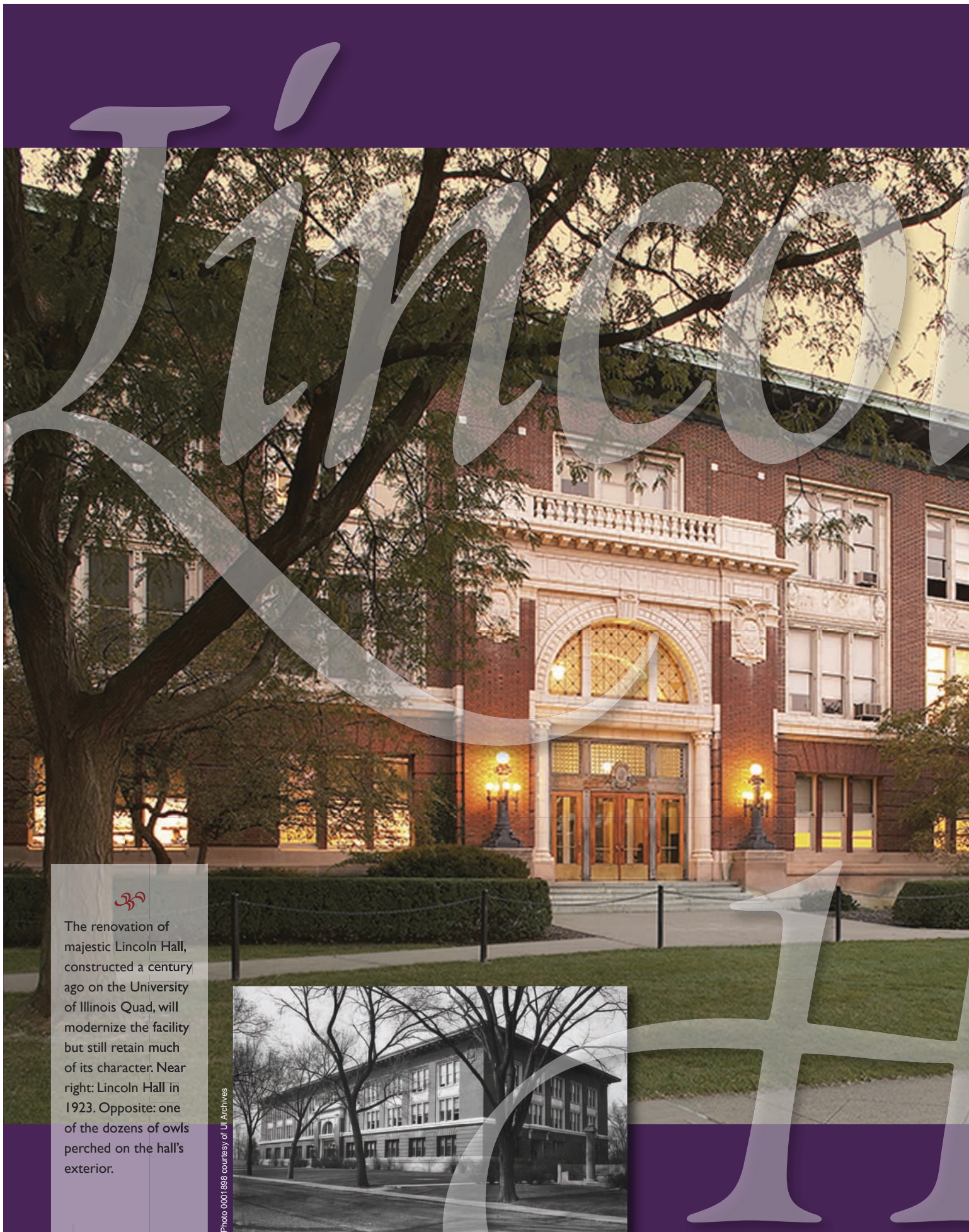
## Lincoln Hall: A Gift For The Ages



The renovation of majestic Lincoln Hall, constructed a century ago on the University of Illinois Quad, will modernize the facility but still retain much of its character. Near right: Lincoln Hall in 1923. Opposite: one of the dozens of owls perched on the hall's exterior.

Photo: 0001888 courtesy of UI Archives





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Photo 0001898 courtesy of UI Archives





# A Gift For The Ages

By Holly Korab



Chris Brown Photo



David Wieggers Photo

It's possible that on a chilly spring evening 73 years ago, a young Pauline Hurd Matteson '31 ED, beautiful at 17, hurried up the steps of Lincoln Hall, a ticket for a fashion revue stuffed securely in her pink satin purse.

Or that young college students relaxed thoughtfully during a study break while sitting in the building's elegant lounge, complete with curved ceiling and terrazzo floors.

Or that luck never ran out for the hundreds of thousands of test-takers who passed by the bust of Abraham Lincoln, giving his nose an anxious rub.

There are a whole lot of memories, collected over a hundred years, within the walls of Lincoln Hall, that iconic building on the west side of the University of Illinois Quad, home to professors, students, theatergoers, actors – and in later years, skunks, squirrels and opossums. In recent count, nearly 16,000 students passed through its hallways each semester, representing nearly every major and field of study the University has to offer. Yet while the world has fought wars, survived financial depressions and negotiated civil unrest, Lincoln Hall has stood largely unchanged, sitting like a weighty time capsule on the campus Quad.

Now with a \$57.3 million state-funded renovation well under way, the University is uncovering the beauty of this old friend and rediscovering a legacy that may prove more powerful than time.









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Holly Korab Photo



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Opposite: The monogram "LH" graces a Lincoln Hall doorway. At left: The refurbishment of Lincoln Hall Theater epitomizes the balance between updating the facility and keeping its soul intact. Top, wider seats to accommodate today's modern body sizes will replace the old ones, but the historic endcaps, middle, are being restored. Bottom: A phalanx of desks, battered by decades of use, await removal in a sunlit classroom.

## A progressive start

Today, a century after Lincoln Hall opened for classes, it is hard to imagine the excitement that greeted its dedication. Before it closed for renovation in 2009, the building had seen just one major expansion – in 1929, which added the west wing and theater – but had undergone no major renovations despite being one of the most heavily used buildings on campus. Ceilings were peeling, and 100-year-old windows rattled in the wind. Graduate students shivered in their fourth-floor attic offices, while dirt obscured the elegance of the structure's original design.

But back on Feb. 12, 1913, such dilapidation may have seemed impossible to the hundreds gathered to mark its dedication. A parade of 400 faculty and dignitaries from around the nation marched along the unpaved road that defined the western edge of the Quad. In attendance were the presidents of the major American universities of the day (approximately 50 at the time), local and state politicians and nearly every member of the UI faculty, which was possible because the University's president, Edmund James James, had canceled all classes.

The U of I was expanding rapidly at the time – four major new buildings in the preceding decade and a student population that would nearly double to 9,249 by the time James retired in 1920. It was the Progressive Era, and the University was benefiting from an industrializing nation's belief that higher education offered a means for social mobility. Less than 5 percent of the nation's 18-to-22-year-olds attended college at that time; still, according to historians like John Thelin and Eugene Tobin, the public was captivated by the concept of college as a place where social standing was earned through ability and achievement rather than bestowed by wealth and ancestry.

Public universities, in particular, were being embraced as vehicles of opportunity. The building that James was dedicating that February day – the centennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth – was a tribute to that promise.

## Education as ennobling

The architectural design of Lincoln Hall fit well as a memorial because President Lincoln, like those planning the new building, believed that education was ennobling. The planners wanted their design to capture that sense of purpose. Students and professors stepping from the wind-swept prairie into the glowing marble foyer were meant by the architect to feel as if they had left the ordinary world behind and had joined in an important endeavor. Indeed, the insistence by James that the building include museums (see pp. 58-59) and departmental libraries reflected that belief.

In its day, Lincoln Hall was innovative in the simplicity of its design. At that time, all buildings financed by the state were

# What's Your Campus Story?

Storyography project seeks to uncover a deeper campus legacy

THERE'S THE OFFICIAL, DOCUMENTED HISTORY of the University of Illinois, and then there's the unwritten one.

Sure, you remember the Morrow Plots and the Alma Mater, but you also recall when a professor lit a stick of fake dynamite in class or the moment you finally mustered the courage – or not – to approach that enchanting classmate in Western Civ. Yes, some campus events are

memorable, but they just don't make the books.

Now, a new University effort hopes to fill those gaps.

Last fall, in conjunction with the renovation of Lincoln Hall, the UI College of Liberal Arts and Sciences launched the Storyography project. As the mighty campus building undergoes re-



1948 Illio Photo

juvenation, so too does Storyography hope to jump-start memories of what the University has meant to people. The power of these stories, it is believed, may help to further define the legacy of life at Illinois.

"Our motto is 'One Hundred Years, a Thousand Stories,'" says **Holly Korab** '80 MEDIA, MS '92 MEDIA, senior director of communications and marketing at LAS. That reflects the fact, she says, "that when we rededicate Lincoln Hall in 2013, it'll be 100 years since the building's first dedication."

Alumni, faculty, staff, students and friends are asked to submit tales of their campus experience by one of several methods. Look to the Storyography website at [www.lincolnhall.illinois.edu/storyography](http://www.lincolnhall.illinois.edu/storyography) to read what's already been posted (including, among many others, that stick of dynamite story) and find out how you can participate. Eventually, some story transcripts will be selected to live in perpetuity at the University's Archives.

Inspired by the nonprofit organization StoryCorps (which features audio recording), Storyography does

*Continued on page 28*



LAS Photo

designed by its politically appointed architect. In 1909 that was W. Carlys Zimmerman, a member of an influential circle of avant-garde architects in Chicago, which included Frank Lloyd Wright. "The Eighteen," as they were known, all shared space in the same Chicago office building and assisted each other with projects.

Today, when Melvyn Skvarla, an architect and campus historic preservation officer, looks at Lincoln Hall, he sees the influence of Wright's Prairie style – the long, horizontal lines and wide, overhanging eaves. In the copper medallions and the monumental, vaulted ceiling in the main entry, Skvarla also sees Italian Renaissance, which may be interpreted as a sign of the University's youth. Many newborn colleges strove for instant authenticity by imitating European colleges and populating their campuses with classical architecture. The Italian Renaissance style was widely accepted as appropriate for academia in that day.

Zimmerman never defined the style of Lincoln Hall, preferring to simply describe it as straightforward. But when Evarts B. Greene, HON '31, a historian and the dean of the UI College of Literature and Arts, suggested that the building be named in honor of Lincoln, Zimmerman thought its dignified design was an appropriate fit.

It's impossible to know if either man anticipated the zeal with which Greene's suggestion would be greeted. The connection between the centennial of Lincoln's birth and his role in signing the land-grant legislation that created public universities struck a chord. The U of I swiftly embraced the idea of transforming their newest building into a memorial to the president who had made their University possible.

## A nod to Lincoln

With the significance of the project now elevated several notches – James liked to brag that Illinois' memorial to Lincoln





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was the nation's largest until eclipsed in 1922 by the one in Washington, D.C. – the planners turned to artisans for ways of incorporating inspirational tributes to the nation's 16th president into the design.

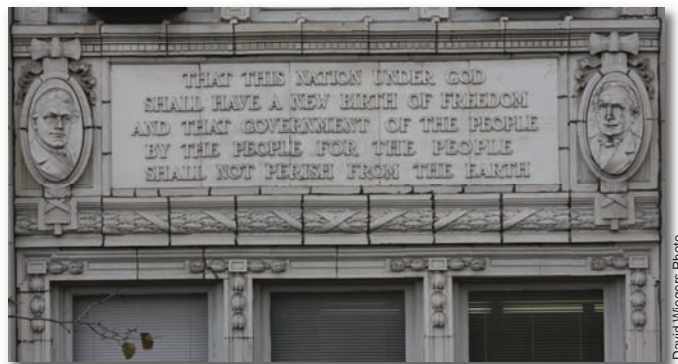
The most extensive tributes were planned for the exterior of the building for maximum impact. Into the space between the second and third floors, Zimmerman incorporated 20 scenic and quote panels which were designed by artist Kristian Schneider to convey the spirit of Lincoln's life. Each quote panel was framed by medallions of key figures from Lincoln's day. (Ten more quote panels with blank medallions were added in 1929 when the building was expanded.) The planners wrote in the dedication program that they could not foresee a time when "young men and women are not to be seen studying these inscriptions and panels."

The panels never quite caught on to the extent the planners imagined. They also miscalculated public reaction to a plaque embossed with the Gettysburg Address and placed in the floor of the foyer. Instead of visitors walking around the plaque and being inspired by Lincoln's famous eulogy, they trampled across it instead. In 1955, out of respect, the University moved it to the south wall.

The most beloved of the Lincoln tributes – the bronze bust whose nose has been rubbed for luck by students on their way to take a test – did not arrive until years later. In 1928 the sculptor Herman Atkins MacNeil delivered the bust of a soulful-looking Lincoln to a gold-painted niche in the center of the foyer's



David Wiegers Photo



David Wiegers Photo

Opposite, top: Built to be both elegant and capacious, Lincoln Hall can accommodate nearly 16,000 students each semester. Above, from top: Homages to a namesake include the hall's beloved bust of Abraham Lincoln; an exterior panel depicting the legendary president as a youthful rail splitter; and a quotation from Lincoln's 1863 address commemorating the Civil War battle at Gettysburg, Pa.

# Storyography continued

include many recorded conversations and interviews. The project, however, allows for a variety of other ways to submit stories, including videos, photos and written comments, in order to accommodate as many participants as possible.

Some people have posted memories about Lincoln Hall itself on the website's long, scrolling Lincoln Hall "Wall," while others have submitted photos and stories to the "Scrapbook" section. If a group shows enough interest, Storyography staff will travel in Illinois to meet with them and record their recollections.

Those who've taken part so far – particularly those involved in recorded conversations or interviews – say Storyography offers a place to express ideas and feelings in an environment

not readily found elsewhere. And those stories, in turn, have engendered unexpected responses.

When Storyography interviewed **Martha Landis '57** LAS, MS '59 LIS, about her late father's annual reading of "A Christmas Carol," she later found it "amazing" that people still remembered him. Paul



Martha Landis with a photo of her late father, Paul.

LAS Photo

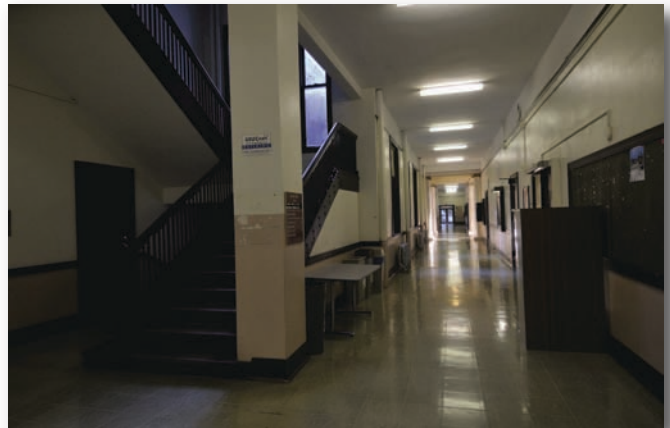
Landis, PHD '23 LAS, was a UI English professor who each winter until 1960 read the well-known Charles Dickens tale to live campus audiences; the Storyography item included a sound clip of his performance. "I never thought I would hear that voice again," one listener wrote. "I am so grateful his dramatic gift is preserved and can still be enjoyed."

No story is too big or small – nor too happy or sad – to include in Storyography. Tales so far include the explanation of the lofty objectives behind the University's first Quad Day, memorable audience commentary during the showing of "Plan 9 from Outer Space" in Lincoln Hall Theater and brushes with soon-to-be famous alumni, such as **Roger Ebert '64** MEDIA.

The goal of 1,000 stories starts with a single step – yours. Let us hear your tale.

– Dave Evensen

*Evensen is a writer for the College of LAS.*



Thompson-McClellan Photo

Above, in a nod to modern classroom needs, the corridors of Lincoln Hall will be slightly narrowed, but other accouterments, such as the old slate chalkboards, will be retained. Below, the renovation spurred the removal of decades of detritus that had accumulated in the basement.

grand staircase, where he has remained ever since. Only twice has the bust been moved: for 24 hours in 1976 when pranksters stole in and left it on a tree stump on a local golf course, and recently, to the Spurlock Museum for safekeeping during the renovation.

Before the bust went into storage, the campus made the controversial decision to restore it.

The three-monthlong process successfully removed the nicks, scrapes and gouges that had accumulated over the bust's 80 years (the most disfiguring of which likely happened when Mr. Lincoln was kidnapped). It also eliminated the shine on his nose.

"If we hadn't restored it, in a few years it would have looked seriously defaced," said Wayne Pitard, director of the Spurlock, in explaining the decision to tamper with a campus tradition. He's hoping alumni will restart the nose-rubbing tradition, which is why the museum placed the bust on display this past February and invited the public, in this case, to "please touch."



Thompson-McClellan Photo

## Out with the old, in with the new – sort of

Tampering with any public treasure, even one as weary as Lincoln Hall, must be approached respectfully, says **Ron Harrison '81** FAA, MARCH '84, the project's lead architect from the Chicago firm of OWP/P|Cannon Design. That's why those working on the renovation have tried to balance preservation with modernization. When the building reopens for classes in fall of 2012, it will retain its sense of history while providing a more sustainable, effective facility for research and teaching.

An example of this balancing act is in Lincoln Hall Theater. While the seats are being replaced with new, wider ones that more easily accommodate today's larger body sizes, the distinc-





David Wiegans Photo



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Lincoln Hall's architects designed the grand marble foyer, left, to evoke a sense of the ennobling nature of education. Above, the as-yet-unrenovated building exhibited beautiful ornamentation, contrasted with low-ceilinged, drafty offices for faculty and teaching assistants. The newly refurbished and reorganized Lincoln Hall will open to students in fall 2012 and will be rededicated on Feb. 12, 2013.

tive cast-iron endcaps at the ends of each row are being restored. In July, contractors tore down the stage's flyspace and three-story cyclorama – two theater relics – so that they could add 8 feet of depth to the stage and more offices on the third floor.

All of the building's 100-year-old windows will be replaced; however, new double-glazed windows of aluminum-clad wood will replicate the look and feel of the original ones, minus the drafts. Not going anywhere will be the nearly 60 owls sculpted into the maroon-colored, exterior window frames on the first floor (and perched around the main foyer). The wisdom they are rumored to impart will come in handy once students and faculty re-enter Lincoln Hall's doors.

The upper floors have been gutted and are being completely remade. The entire building is receiving sophisticated new heating and cooling systems as well as the equivalent of 1.5 acres of restored masonry, 3.2 miles of "micro piles" for structural support and enough new electric service to power 67 homes with 100-amp panels.

## Respecting the past

Most of the preservation efforts are being concentrated on the first floor, where the original architects lavished most of the

adornments, and on the exterior, which is qualified for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. For example, contractors are repairing any damage to the historic panels and medallions on the outside and are replacing the slate roof and the copper flashing and downspouts with similar materials.

Even the mortar between the bricks is being refurbished in historically accurate ways. Because of the greater variance among bricks used in the early 1900s, the masons who are tuck-pointing Lincoln Hall are recreating "the historic, horizontal joint in the mortar to make a little shadow line that implied more horizontality and consistency than there actually was," said Susan Turner, an historic preservationist with Bailey Edward, one of the firms working on Lincoln Hall. This groove will make the bricks appear more uniform.

On the first floor, hallways will shrink by a foot to make the classroom space more flexible – a request from the faculty, though the change in dimensions will hardly be noticeable. The contractors will be reinstalling the slate chalk boards – another faculty request – as well as the stripped and refinished oak picture and chair rails, window trim and 5,000 lineal feet of baseboard. The old-growth white oak doors will also return, although they will now be recessed into the classrooms so that when opened, they do not extend into busy corridors.





Holly Korab Photo

## Character issues

In some instances, to retain the character of the building, the architects are leaving areas untouched, such as the dips in the marble steps where decades of traffic have worn them away.

“The first rule of historic renovation is to do no harm,” said Harrison. “There will be a lot of rough edges and worn patina that will maintain the continuity of the history of the building.”

Such will not be the case in other historic areas, particularly the theater, where the original character begs to be resuscitated. For instance, most people probably remember the theater’s color as predominantly a mucky green; a paint chronologist, though, uncovered a much different history. He found evidence of more than 37 original historic colors as well as gold stencils. The colors in the original theater were more vibrant and nuanced than anyone imagined. Some other historic areas are being rediscovered and will be revived in the new building.

Underneath the building, Harrison found a beautiful former smoking lounge which had been obscured by plywood walls and doors that had converted the space into dismal graduate student offices in the late 1960s or ’70s. The lounge will be reborn in the renovated Lincoln Hall as a café, which will open onto a newly landscaped courtyard surrounding the theater – two lost treasures now found.

## Relics and myths

Demolition, however, couldn’t erase all remnants of the building’s former occupants. Contractors have found numerous reminders of the facility’s former occupants – from between walls and under rubble they’ve retrieved letters, old maps and instruments, pop bottles from companies long forgotten and even a pink satin purse containing a ticket for a 1928 fashion revue. A tuition stub in the purse carried the likely owner’s name – Pauline Martha Hurd.





In another nod to the past, when researching the rare “composite” ornamentation in the theater, the project’s historic preservationist discovered that it had been produced by the same family-run company that worked on Chicago’s 1893 Columbian Exposition. Remarkably, the company, Decorator’s Supply, still exists and will be involved in the decorative work’s rehabilitation.

Digging into the past has come at the expense of some popular myths, however, including the delightfully gory one about the hexagonal structures that hang from the ceiling of the theater. Members of the Chi Omega sorority will be disappointed to learn that these boxes are not the coffins of their four founding members. Instead, they were added in 1938 as part of a new air-cooling system. They will not be included in the restoration.

### Higher education today

These relics and myths are reminders that this beloved building is much more than bricks and mortar. Many alumni and faculty have memories of love that began, and ended, in Lincoln Hall. They have recalled classes that awakened a dream or may still be laughing over the memorable graffiti on bathroom walls. Others recall archaeological collections stored in the basement, patiently awaiting rediscovery.

When the governor’s office announced in July 2009 that the Legislature had approved funds for renovating the building, the news was met with relief. During the long years in which this once-proud building continued to slip into disrepair (especially during the decade when it bobbed up and down on the state’s list of capital development projects), its



Holly Korab Photo

Working around an existing structure proved problematic at times; above, materials get hauled in through Lincoln Hall’s windows. At lower left, tuckpointing follows historically accurate methods, including a shadow line to give a more uniform appearance to the bricks. Opposite: Area wells excavated along the east side of Lincoln Hall will bring in fresh air through basement-level louvers.

uncertain fate had, for many, come to symbolize the fragile financial relationship between the University and the state.

At one time, support for public higher education was a sure thing, and the main obstacle standing between bright high school students and their attendance at Illinois was their ability. In the past, the state’s significant subsidy had helped keep a college education within reach for the majority of Illinois families; today, however, that funding has decreased significantly. So while the release of monies secured Lincoln Hall’s future, access to opportunity – the core of the land-grant mission – remains endangered.

But for all of these insecurities, it seemed at times to those involved in the renovation project as if mysterious forces were at work ... almost as if Mr. Lincoln himself is watching over his legacy.

How else to explain the repeated coincidences as the project began to unfold: The original appropriation, for example, was in 1909, while the new one arrived in 2009. The original construction began in 1910, the renovation in 2010. The original dedication and the next will be separated by exactly 100 years to the day.

When the campus rededicates the renovated Lincoln Hall on Feb. 12, 2013, it will again be one of the most heavily used buildings on campus and a center of learning.

The University also hopes it will be a symbol of a re-energized commitment to the land-grant mission. If so, then Lincoln Hall will truly be, to paraphrase Edwin Stanton’s famous pronouncement of Lincoln’s legacy, a new gift for the ages.

*Korab ’80 MEDLA, MS ’92 MEDLA, is the senior director of communications and marketing at the UI College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, which will return to its Lincoln Hall home in 2012.*

*Design by Stephanie Swift, Art Director, University of Illinois Alumni Association.*



Holly Korab Photo