



Let us take this opportunity to thank you all for your patience during our recent renovation. We recognize that last summer's closing inconvenienced many of you. Our staff enjoyed meeting with members on the sidewalk, but we know that the experience was not the same as actually coming into the Library. We hope you will agree that the result was well worth the disruption. These renovations were made possible by the extraordinary generosity of the George Marshall Hornblower Trust; the Estate of Marian O. Naumburg., and Assunta, Ignazio, Ada, and Romano Peluso. Please enjoy this special renovation issue of the Library's *Notes*, prepared by our Renovation Librarian, Andrew Corbin. See you under the skylight.


Mark Bartlett
Head Librarian


Charles G. Berry
Chairman of the Board

The Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) once remarked, "I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library." Those of us who have come to depend upon the New York Society Library for the nourishment of our souls might be tempted to take that statement one step further: The Library *is* Paradise. For book lovers, there can be no doubt that our beautiful landmarked building on East 79th Street not only houses a collection of books remarkable for its depth and breadth, but also offers the perfect atmosphere in which to read, study, write, or simply escape from the hustle and bustle of the city. This is why we are very pleased to report that the renovation the Library initiated this past summer has finally been completed. After months of hammering, drilling, concrete pouring, and welding, peace and quiet have once again been restored to our Paradise.

There were four renovation projects happening at the Library simultaneously:

- 1) Funds from the Hornblower Trust made it possible to fill in the lightwell space above the main staircase, increasing floor and shelving space on floors three, four, and five;
- 2) The Hornblower Trust also funded the renovation of the fifth floor to increase the seating capacity of the Large Study Room and raise the number of private study rooms from two to six;
- 3) A generous donation from the Peluso family enabled us to restore the antique skylight above the main stairs;
- 4) The Naumburg Estate funded the handicapped access in the entry hall.



THE TEAM

The Library was lucky to have James V. Czajka of JVC Architects, who specializes in buildings for arts and letters, as its architect for this renovation. Some of Czajka's recent projects include the renovation and expansion of the new Playwright Horizons Theater School Studios in the East Village and the Rockwell Museum of Western Art in Corning, New York. The Library is also fortunate in having two very distinguished architects on its Board of Trustees: Jean Parker Phifer is the Chair of the Library's Building and Renovation Committee and an architect specializing in planning, restoration, and sustainable design projects for cultural institutions, and Byron Bell, also a member of the Building and Renovation Committee, has been designing experimental and cutting-edge public spaces for more than 35 years as senior partner in Bell Larson Architects and Planners. As a contractor, the Library engaged the services of 30M Construction, whose president, John McBride, was already familiar with the building from the 2006-2007 renovation. Our indispensable building Superintendent John McKeown not only worked closely with 30M Construction but, with the help of Harry Abarca, kept things running as smoothly as possible in the Library during this disruptive period.

FILLING IN THE LIGHTWELL

It is difficult to imagine an activity more antithetical to the workings of a library than the pouring of concrete, but in order to extend the third, fourth, and fifth floors into the lightwell above the main staircase on the east side of the building, that is just what we had to do. The first slab poured was the one directly over the main staircase. This was also one of the tensest parts of the entire renovation because this slab would be directly over the skylight we planned on restoring. The pouring had to be precise or there would not be enough room for the panes of glass, which were safely offsite being restored at Rohlf's Stained and Leaded Glass Studio in Mount Vernon, New York.

On a Friday afternoon in late August, the hose pouring the concrete was hoisted up the side of the Library with the aid of a very tall crane and in through one of the front windows in the now demolished Large Study Room on the fifth floor. The hose was then led through a window on the east wall of the Large Study Room and down the lightwell so that the concrete could be poured into a frame our contractors had built. Again, a great deal of credit needs to be extended to our contractor John McBride of 30M Construction, who guided this difficult operation with a steady and confidence-inspiring hand.

Right: A dizzying view of the concrete being poured up the side of the building.





Look closely and you can see a hose coming through the window and down the side of the building.

The workmen could then proceed with pouring the slabs for the fourth and fifth floors, plus the new roof, while bricking up the new east side of the building.

The new space on the fifth floor was fully renovated and expanded, but the raw spaces on the third and fourth floors will remain unfinished until such a time as new renovation plans have been drafted and funding provided. We hope that these spaces will allow us to expand the Children's Library on the third floor and provide additional space on the fourth floor for staff offices and an enlarged Book Conservation Lab.



30M Construction president John McBride (right) and a workman after the first concrete pour.

One of the workmen bricking up the new east wall of the building.



EXPANDING AND RENEWING THE FIFTH FLOOR

The fifth floor is one of the Library's greatest assets, a place for quiet writing and studying. Recent years, however, have seen a surge in usage of both the two private study rooms, available for reservation by members, and the Large Study Room, available on a first come-first served basis. What was once a haven for writers, students, and readers was becoming increasingly crowded. With the Library's expansion into the lightwell on the east side of the building, we were able to reconfigure the fifth floor to allow for an additional four private study rooms. We were also able to increase the seating capacity in the Hornblower Room. At present, there are seats for 30 people to work comfortably in this reconfigured space.



One of the private study rooms photographed just before the reopening of the fifth floor on November 1, 2010.



Above: Two views of the newly renovated Hornblower Room.

Below: The first users of the Hornblower Room hard at work.

Every detail of the newly refurbished space was subjected to the scrutiny of the committee overseeing the renovations, from the strikingly dramatic black and white carpet to the Aeron chairs and the beautiful woodwork hand-crafted by Ian LaFemina. The entire floor, including the six study rooms, has wireless internet access. The response from Library members who regularly use the fifth floor has been overwhelmingly positive—from the moment the floor was reopened at 9 AM on Monday, November 1, the Hornblower Room and all six of the private rooms have been in constant use.



As architect Jim Czajka noted, however, there are perhaps some ancient principles at work in this newly renovated space: “The proportions of the room changed, but, as it turns out, in a very interesting way. The original room measured about 37'x18', which is a ratio of approximately of 2 to 1. The plan could be thought of as two adjacent squares. This would have made the practical Romans very happy indeed—so much of Roman architecture consists of basic geometric shapes symmetrically disposed. The new extended plan, however, measures 37' by 23', and the ratio is now about 1.6 to 1, which, as you fans of mathematics know, is very close to the golden ratio—that perfect proportion that repeats itself endlessly in either direction. It was first identified by the Greeks and used regularly in their architecture, sculpture, and music. The plan is now a golden rectangle. So when you're working in the Hornblower Room, if you happen to look up and notice a new quality of rightness in the space, a feeling of balance, a sense of the infinite, it's probably because you've turned a corner in your research, but it might be because *you had been working in the Pantheon, and now you're working in the Parthenon.*”



Above: Presiding over the Hornblower Room is this 1867 statue of “Faith” by Hiram Powers (1805–1873), one of the treasures from the Goodhue Collection.



Left: The beautiful new wooden lockers on the fifth floor were available for use at the start of 2011.



Right: The new standing computer station on the fifth floor.

RESTORING THE SKYLIGHT

It is hard to believe that until quite recently, the dropped ceiling above the main staircase of the Library hid one of the building's most spectacular features, a leaded skylight. An original feature of the John Rogers House, which was built in 1917 by the architectural firm of Trowbridge and Livingston and converted to use as a library in 1937, the skylight was covered in the 1940s. According to our records, the skylight was damaged and leaking, so rather than engage in costly repair work that the Library could not afford at the time, the decision was made to cover and protect the skylight until some later date. A March 2010 *New York Times* column ("Streetscapes: Where Fusty is Fabulous") by former Library Trustee Christopher Gray was instrumental in bringing attention to this hidden treasure.

Given that we were going to be expanding the building eastward into the lightwell, which is directly above the skylight, we decided to take this opportunity to restore this beautiful feature to as close to its original state as possible. Of course, after having been covered up for over sixty years, the skylight looked far from glorious—panes were missing or cracked, and everything was covered in a thick layer of grime.

The real surprise, however, was the wonderfully detailed plaster molding framing the skylight, which, because we had only seen the skylight from above, we were not fully aware of until the dropped ceiling beneath it had been removed.

The Library engaged the services of Rohlf's Stained and Leaded Glass Studio in Mount Vernon, New York, to restore the skylight and replace the damaged or missing glass panes (which amounted to roughly 40% of the skylight). This turned out to be surprisingly difficult: we were able to find glass that was the same color and we were able to find glass that had the same seeding (an interior pattern of bubbles and streaks), but it ultimately proved impossible to find glass that had both qualities. Fortunately, Rohlf's Studio came up with an ingenious solution. Using an age-old technique known as "plating," whereby two plates of glass are leaded together, one behind the other, to combine their qualities, they were able to recreate the appearance of the original glass. When the glass was returned, it was close to impossible to tell what was new and what was original.



The skylight in its pre-restoration state.



The plasterwork in May 2010, pre-restoration.



Restored and repaired panes of glass. Note the hint of yellow in the border—it is repeated in the centerpiece of the skylight.



It was nerve-wracking to see the restored panels of glass being returned and reinstalled, especially when we realized hammers would be involved, but it all went exceptionally smoothly.



When the final panel of glass (the rectangular, slightly tinted centerpiece) was settled into place, we all breathed an enormous sigh of relief.



Once the panes of glass were back in place, the artisans from Ernest Neumann Studios could really get to work restoring the decorative plaster frame. This involved a great deal of cleaning, repairing, painting, and glazing. The result is splendid.



Details of the molding's exquisite garland of fruits and vegetables and the stenciled panels.



MAKING THE LIBRARY HANDICAP ACCESSIBLE

Installing the Handi-Lift, essentially a platform that runs on a track secured to the western wall of the entryway, was no easy task. In order to fix the track to the wall so that the lift could travel smoothly and safely, several things needed to be done. First, we had to remove the wide landing from the middle of the limestone staircase, plus all of the steps from the bottom half of the staircase.

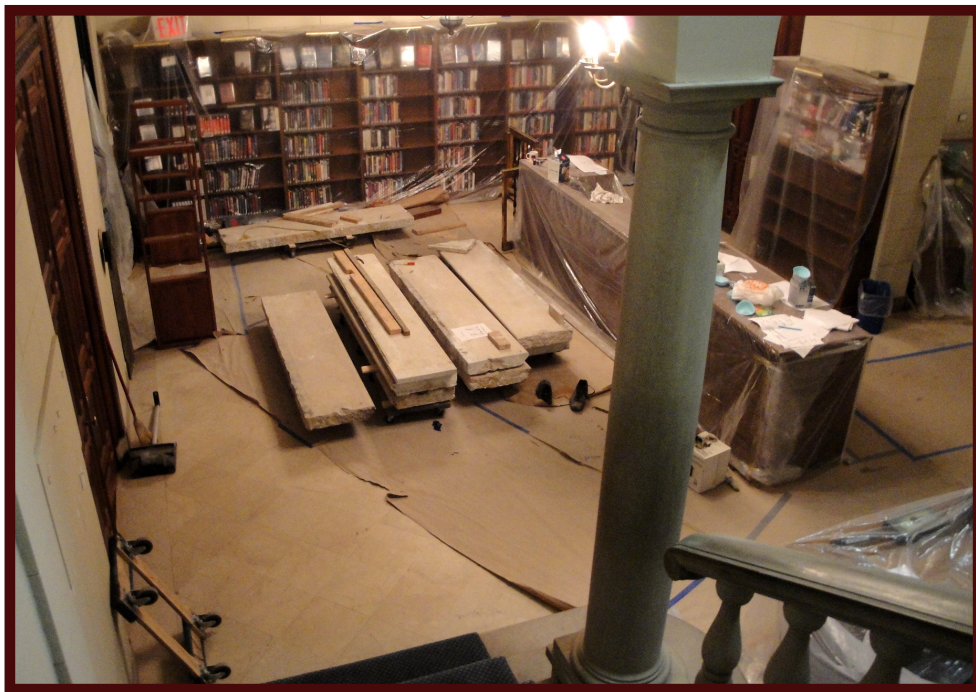
Right: The limestone steps in the main entryway before the demolition. Note the wide landing.



Above: The main entryway following removal of the limestone steps.

Right: One of the workmen from 30M in the area beneath the stairs designated Closed Stacks. The area is used for storing oversized books and periodicals.





Above: After removal, the limestone stairs from the main entryway were piled up in front of the Circulation Desk.

We then had to reset the steps so that the staircase ran in an unobstructed line from the top to the bottom landing. We were able to reuse all of the original steps, each of which was made of the finest quality Italian limestone known as Botticino Fiorito from Brescia, just east of Milan. As a testimony to our superb contractor, 30M Construction, many of the contractors the Library spoke with when we began this project told us it was highly unlikely that the steps could be preserved. 30M President John McBride was the lone exception. Not only was he able to rise to the challenge, but not a single slab of limestone was broken or even cracked. In the end, the stairs looked so good that when we reopened the Library, it took some work to convince members that something had actually been done in the entryway.



Left: Corrugated steel decking supports the new steps.

Above: The main entryway after all work was completed.

We also had to reinforce the west wall with concrete to ensure it could bear the weight of the lift.



Above: The west wall fully reinforced and ready to bear the weight of the Handi-Lift.

Left: The frame for the new concrete.

Finally, there was the problem of making the actual threshold to the building fully accessible, which meant lowering the entire doorway so that it was level with the sidewalk on 79th Street. Previously, anyone wishing to enter the building would have had to step up from street level, an obvious impediment to our building being handicap accessible. The new design was approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.



Above Right: Workmen removing and lowering the old step up into the building.

Left: The new threshold, now flush with the sidewalk on 79th Street.

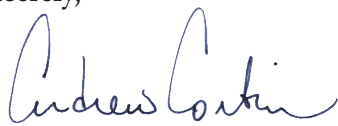
Right: The Handi-Lift ready for service.



BACK TO (NEW) NORMAL

We hope that this final renovation update adequately explains what all the noise and dust was about this summer. As ever, if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at renovation@nysoclib.org. In the meantime, we trust you will agree that these improvements to the Library only deepen its already extraordinary capacity to offer solace and literary nourishment to those of us for whom the Library is as necessary as air, food, or water.

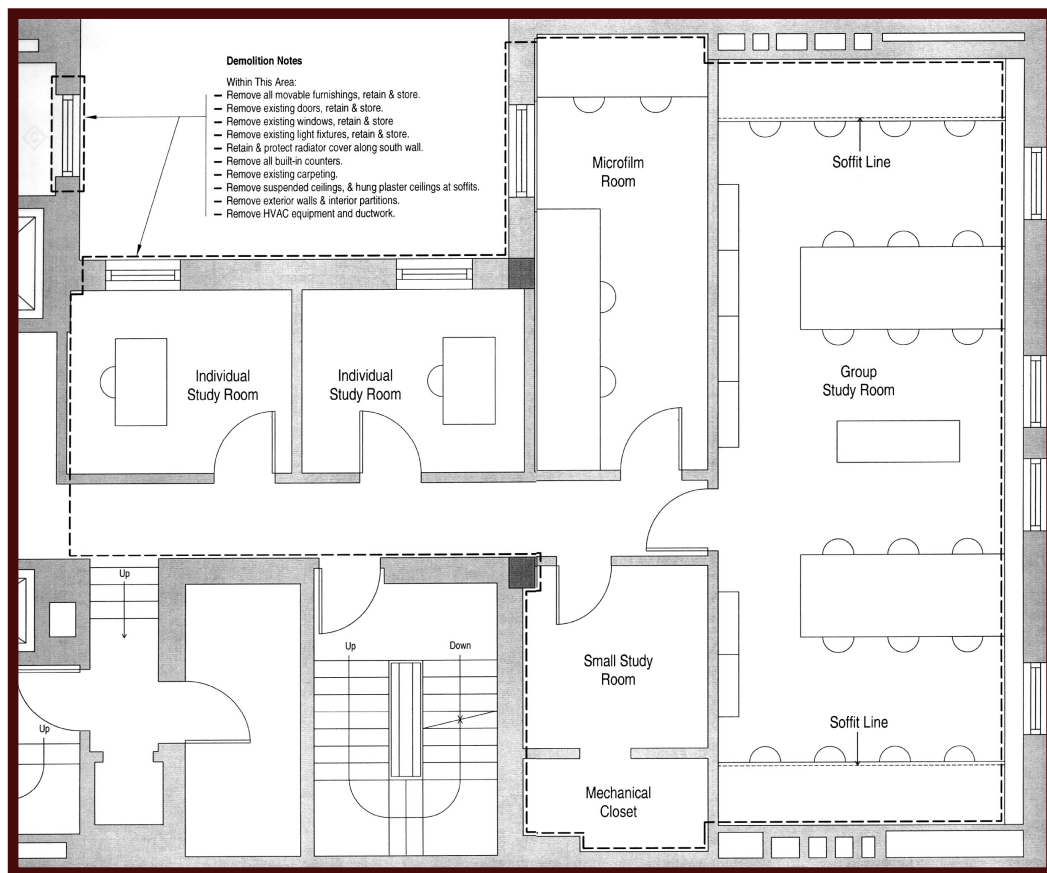
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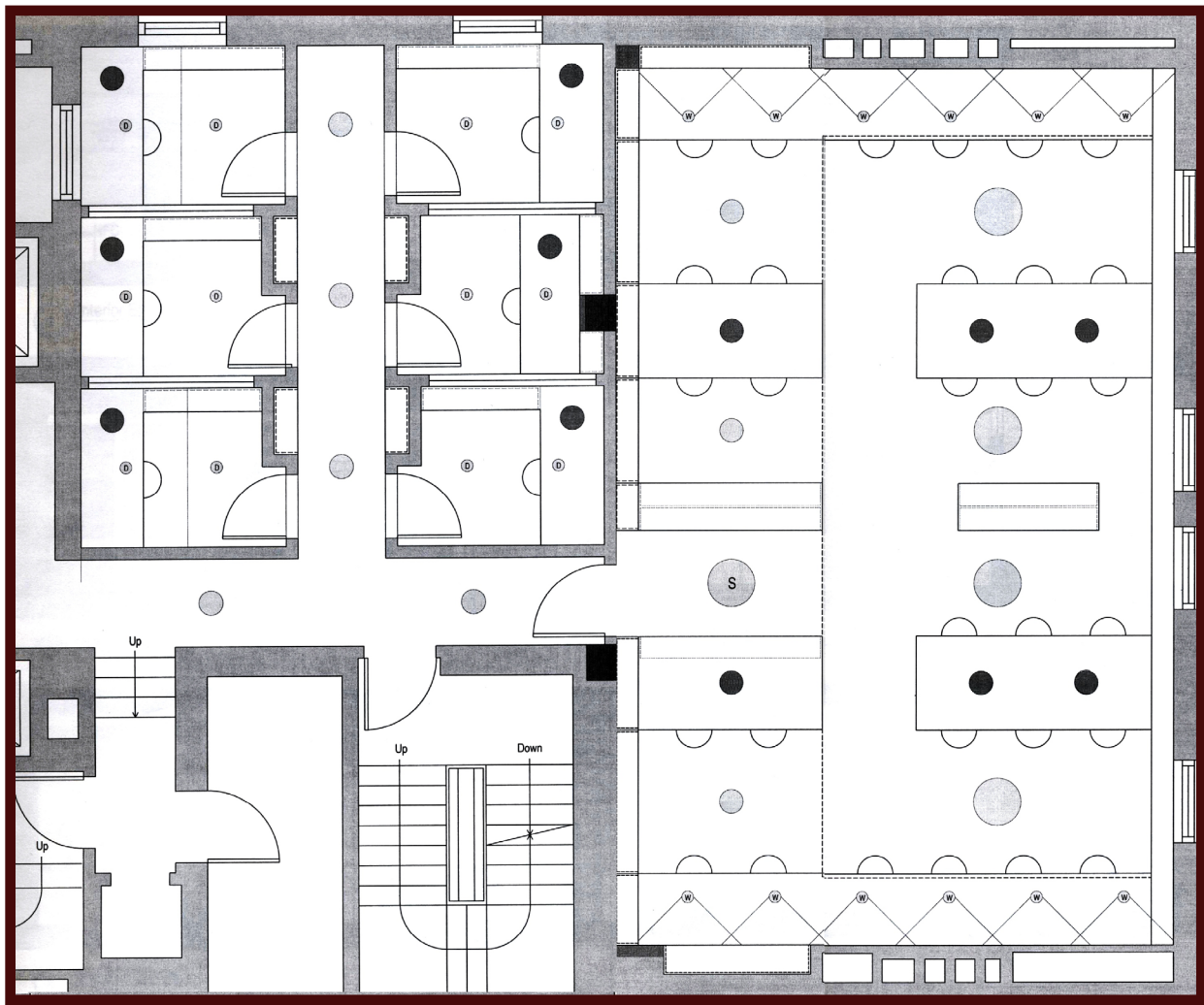
Andrew Corbin
Renovation Projects Librarian



They are taking some getting used to, but these automated doors are a crucial part of making the Library handicap accessible.



Left: The Fifth Floor prior to the renovation, with only two individual study rooms.



The Fifth Floor today.

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