

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Reconstruction revives Bangor landmark



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Workers put the finishing touches on the outside of the Maine Hall at the former campus of the Bangor Theological Seminary. The building soon will serve as senior housing. *Buy Photo*

By Andrew Neff, BDN Staff

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BANGOR, Maine — Three years and more than \$5 million later, a historic Bangor landmark that once was a home away from home for religious students is about to become a permanent home for retirees and older citizens.

Built by the Bangor Theological Seminary 177 years ago at a cost of \$13,000 to house people interested in joining the ministry, the now 106-foot-long, 38-foot-wide building has been undergoing a \$4 million renovation for the last 12 months.

Community Housing of Maine, a nonprofit housing organization, bought Maine Hall for \$250,000 in September 2009 to develop it into a 28-unit complex — 16 studio or efficiency apartments and 12 one-bedroom apartments.

The seminary moved in 2005 to the campus of Husson University.

Maine Hall, perched on a gradually sloped tract of land tucked between Union Street and Hammond Street, will become a permanent home for elderly, low-income residents as early as mid-September.

“I like the historic elements of this building and I love the building itself,” said Erin Cooperrider, development director

for Community Housing of Maine. "A lot of attention was paid to making this a modern, state-of-the art housing facility without affecting the historic architecture."

That included preserving every carving, arch and molding, as well as frames, sashes, six-panel doors, original hardwood flooring, and even the nails still in some of the flooring. But there will be plenty of modern conveniences and amenities, such as wireless Internet service, energy recovery ventilators, high-efficiency, gas-fired boilers, sensor lighting key card-activated laundry equipment, and keyless doors.

Even some of the items found tucked away in corners and dusty recesses of the attic will figure into the building's historic preservation.

"We found some really interesting stuff up there," said Randy Poulton, site superintendent for Nickerson & O'Day Inc., the construction management company for the project. "We found an ivory lice comb, a silver ashtray, White Owl cigar boxes, lots of old papers and documents, food containers, and some beer and liquor bottles."

"Haffenreffer was apparently the beer of choice," Poulton said with a chuckle.

Judging from the presence of several empty bottles, Christian Brothers Ruby Pink fortified wine also seemed to be the popular alcohol choice.

"I don't know, but I think they used the attic as an assembly space at one point," Poulton said. "Clearly there was social activity of some kind going on up there."

Some particularly interesting finds included a kind of homemade musical instrument whose mouthpiece was fashioned from a .50-caliber bullet that was drilled through the middle and attached to a hollow piece of wood, a stair tread signed by the original builders, a time capsule in one of the staircases with the builders' signatures, adult "pulp" magazines from the 1940s featuring starlets in bathing suits, and a large map stuffed between the walls.

"It's in remarkably great condition with very little water damage," Poulton said of the map, which was made in the early 20 century. "It's a large map comparing land ownership in the Middle East during biblical times. It's pretty cool."

Many of the items will be displayed behind original windows, which are now in inside walls as a result of the renovations.

"This building has been placed on the National ... Register of Historic Places, so this falls under National Park Service guidelines and restrictions," said Karl Ward, president and CEO of Nickerson & O'Day, which built the seminary's library on the same campus and renovated the steeple. "All of this has to pass inspection by National Parks Service officials."

That includes the "rain barrel" exterior trim paint and the masonry, which has to match the original mortar color. Even the decorative "railing" above the front porch, which had disappeared and not been seen for 50-plus years, according to Cooperrider, was replicated and reinstalled.

"There really wasn't anything we were able to leave totally alone," said Cooperrider. "We're at a stage now where not everyone is always feeling good as we're walking through doing the punch list [inspections of all work and making necessary revisions], but everyone has said it looks great."

The work has involved — at various points — as many as 20 design professionals and another 100 to 120 workers.

"The work has been really complicated, but the quality is great, they're delivering it on time, and all the details have been taken care of," Cooperrider added. "They really have gone over and above on many fronts."

Nickerson & O'Day even built a 4,000-square-foot addition to the building for office space, a common room, public bathroom, and two studio apartments as well as a new elevator while making the entire building handicapped-accessible. Sixteen of the 28 units are fully handicapped-accessible. Four of them already are fully equipped.

"We targeted Maine Hall to be LEED gold standard, and it will certainly be silver," Cooperrider said, referring to the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design building certification system, whose gold standard is 60 or more points out of a possible 110. "We've tried to make this as efficient as we can and even recycled 37 percent of the construction waste."

The first tenants are scheduled to start moving in next month. Information is available by calling Community Housing of Maine at 827-3746. Monthly rent ranges from \$538 to \$646 for efficiencies and \$577 to \$693 for one-room units at 288

Union St.

“This is my favorite project,” said Cooperrider, who has been involved with 25 total in her nine years with Community Housing of Maine. “I can’t wait to see the porch with chairs on it after it’s all done. It’s a beautiful building in a beautiful spot with some amazing views.”

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