



Photo Credit: Michael Stavaridis



39th Annual Massachusetts PRESERVATION AWARDS

THE HARVARD LAMPOON BUILDING, CAMBRIDGE REHABILITATION & RESTORATION

Located just south of Harvard Square in Cambridge, at the intersection of Bow, Mt. Auburn, and Plympton streets, the Harvard Lampoon occupies a unique building that was one of the last major works of prominent Boston City Architect Edmund Wheelwright. Wheelwright, himself a Harvard alumnus and a founder of the Harvard Lampoon magazine, one of the nation's first college humor magazines, wanted the building to embody the comical nature of the publication. Completed in 1909, the Harvard Lampoon Building exhibits an unusual synthesis of the formal Gothic and early Renaissance styles, with Flemish architectural influences, and is marked by a whimsical, anthropomorphic tower at its main entrance. The success of the design is indicated by the fact that the building has become both the trademark of the publication and one of the most recognizable landmarks of its Cambridge neighborhood.

A century after its completion, the Lampoon Building still retained its original character and motifs, but was in need of functional, structural, and cosmetic work. The most significant challenge was the need for a secondary means of egress from the second floor to meet modern building code requirements. The only feasible option was to add a new exterior door and fire escape on the Plympton Street façade, yet the prominence of this façade meant that any intervention needed to be thoroughly thought out and precisely executed, in order to maintain the building's integrity. To that end, the design for the secondary egress included a new door with a limestone surround and Tudor hood molding, which were carefully integrated into the existing stringcourse. The new fire escape is shrouded with a decorative wrought-iron railing that runs

the full width of the Plympton Street façade. Designed after a careful study of early 20th-century metalwork in Boston and Cambridge, the railing features distinct metal newels that complement the historic motifs of the building, including "HL" monograms, grotesques with jester hats, and three book-shaped cartouches that together spell out the Lampoon's original motto, "Vanitas."

Along with the insertion of the new egress, significant structural problems were addressed on the Plympton Street façade. A steel beam had rusted over the ground-floor entry and windows, resulting in severe cracking of the surrounding masonry. Once the beam was cleaned, reinforced, and waterproofed, the damaged area of limestone was patched and replaced as needed. Restoration of the masonry and windows at the building's east end was also undertaken. All exterior masonry was cleaned, and inappropriate mortar used in previous repairs was replaced with mortar matching the original in color and texture. Similarly, on the interior, the inappropriate replacement black mortar was removed and, after cleaning, it was possible to match the original mortar's light color and texture appropriately. Leaded-glass windows, whose deterioration had been accelerated due to their being covered by unvented storm panels, were cleaned and repainted once those panels were removed.

The planning, research, and attention to detail that went into the restoration of the Harvard Lampoon Building exemplify how restoration should be done. The playful style of the original design, as well as fine historic craftsmanship and materials, were all taken into account, and the overall project has made a positive contribution to the building's architecture and to its surroundings.

List of Contributors:

John Tittman, Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects
 Aaron Helfand, Albert, Righter & Tittmann Architects
 Michael Gnazzo, Cenazo, LLC
 Susan Close, Hammersmith Studios, LLC
 Carl Close, Hammersmith Studios, LLC
 Roberto Rosa, Serpentino Stained Glass Studio
 Tom Curran, Fire Escape Services
 Dr. Judith Selwyn, Preservation Technology Associates, LLC
 James Balmer, Boston Building Consultants
 Gary Iredell, Level & Plumb Builders