



Alumni Recitation Hall
(ARH)

ALUMNI RECITATION HALL (commonly referred to as ARH)

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Type of architecture/construction - Three story Tudor-style with Gothic features (entrance arches and buttresses found on all sides), red brick with limestone trimming. This building was reported to have been the first use of reinforced concrete ribbed-slab construction in Iowa

Gross Sq. Ft. - 42,686 Net Sq. Ft. - 33,521 Original dimensions - 168' X 63'

Date of completion of original construction - February 1917

Initial Cost - Approximately \$171,000

Principal Architect - H. Rawson of Proudfoot, Bird, & Rawson of Des Moines, IA

General Contractor - Bailey - Marsh of Minneapolis, MN - Their fee was 5% of the cost of construction

Initial Functions - General classroom recitation building for non-laboratory, non-studio classes

Major renovations

Date - 1969 - Cosmetic renovation with addition of dropped acoustic ceilings, asbestos floor tile installed in many of the classrooms, fluorescent light fixtures replaced incandescent fixtures, size of restrooms was increased, sound equipment installed for use as language laboratory, and installation of writing laboratory in the annex between Carnegie and ARH

Renovation Designer - All changes were designed by Dale Hawn, Director of Physical Plant, Grinnell College

Cost - Approximately \$100,000

Date - 1989-90 - Full mechanical systems replacement, partial structural reorganization, complete cosmetic renovation and completely refurbished, addition of state-of-the-art audio visual, writing, language and computer laboratories.

Principal Architect - Ben Weese of Weese, Langley, Weese - Chicago, IL

General Contractor - Loomis Brothers of Cedar Rapids, IA

Total Cost (including all fees, furnishings and equipage) - \$5,614,168
Architectural/engineering cost - \$366,000

Post renovation function - General classroom building including audio-visual,
language, computer and writing laboratories

COMMENTS:

Initial Design and Construction

By the time the 20th Century arrived, Grinnell College's campus supported six buildings (Alumni Hall, Blair Hall, Chicago Hall, Goodnow Hall, Rand Gymnasium for Women, and the Mens' Gymnasium) that provided housing for the College's academic programs. By 1907 three more academic buildings (Carnegie Library, The Associations Building, and Herrick Chapel) had been added to Central Campus.

By 1910 the student enrollment had grown to over 650 (480 in the College Program, 102 in the Academy, and over 70 in the Music School). President J. H. T. Main advised the Trustees in 1910 that a large recitation building headed the list of the College's most pressing building needs. for academic facilities. In 1914, President Main re-emphasized the need for a large recitation classroom building and directed the College's first development officer to design a program to raise funds for the new "Alumni Hall." Shortly after that time the Trustees approved the appointment of H. A. Rawson of the Proudfoot, Bird and Rawson architectural firm of Des Moines, IA to develop preliminary plans for the recitation classroom building. He was commissioned to design a building that was in accord with the campus landscape plan previously prepared by R. F. Weyrick, also of Des Moines, IA. Rawson had been the principal architect on the design of the Women's' Quadrangle Dormitory Complex on South Campus and later also served in that role for the Men's Quadrangle Dormitory Complex.

Rawson prepared preliminary plans that proposed a three-wing building complex to be located in accord with Weyrick's campus plan immediately north of Carnegie Library on Park Street. In his original design, the three wings were to be connected, although each of the three sections clearly constituted an individual facility. Together they were to form a conceptual architectural whole. In November 1915 for fund raising purposes, ground was broken for the construction of the "New Alumni Building," so named because of the contributions of the College's alumni toward its construction. In December 1915 President Main recommended to the Board the construction of two wings of the proposed building using the \$50,000 generated from alumni pledges and \$30,000 of other college funds. In February 1916 the Board approved the appointment of Bailey-Marsh of Minneapolis as the general contractor on the Alumni Hall Project. The Board also gave the Bailey-Marsh firm instructions

to begin work on the building as soon as feasible. Bailey-Marsh had also served as the general contractor for the construction of the Women's Quadrangle. Their fee for serving as general contractor on the Alumni Building was to be 5% of the construction cost. In April 1916 because of funding limitations, the Board instructed Bailey Marsh to build a single wing of the proposed building at an estimated cost of approximately \$150,000 + and to complete it as soon as possible. The Board stated an intention to build the other two portions of the building as funding became available.

Business Manager L. V. Phelps was appointed to serve as the College's supervisor of construction on the new building. It is noteworthy that Phelps had come to Grinnell in 1914 as Bailey-Marsh's supervisor of construction for the Women's Quadrangle project. Near the time of completion of that project, President Main offered him the opportunity to stay on at Grinnell as Business Manager and Phelps accepted the offer. He quickly became a highly respected officer of the College and remained in that position for thirty-five years. He truly deserves a great deal of credit for shepherding the great number of changes that took place in the physical facilities and the finances of the College during the duration of his service.

In January 1916 the following description of the proposed building appeared in the Scarlet and Black : "This latest addition to Grinnell College will be located in the northwest corner of the campus. It will have a frontage of 165 feet on Park St. and will have a depth of 63 ft. It will be three stories in height, without a basement. It will be constructed of red, hard finish brick, with stone trimmings."

"The building will be just exactly what it is termed; a recitation building. It will put Grinnell right on a par in this department with any college in the country. It will be modern, substantial and built for the future. It will provide for the needs of Grinnell for years to come. The best of ventilating systems will be installed and this is only one of the many ways in which the building will be a model for recitation purposes."

"As at present planned the building will include nineteen large recitation rooms. The average size of these rooms will be about 26 feet by 22, but there are several larger than this, and there will be one room 50 by 21 feet. There will be an auditorium fitted with a balcony, which will seat about 450 people. There will be ample cloak and toilet rooms, with marble appointments."

"The new building will be connected with the north wing of the library by a one story cloister similar to that which connects Mears Cottage with the main building of the woman's quadrangle."

"The building will be conveniently arranged, with broad stair cases and corridors, all with the single purpose of making it the best recitation building that can be devised."

During the planning stages of the new building, a controversy arose as to whether the building should have a flat roof or a mansard roof. After several weeks, it was decided to install the flat roof. However, construction was held up during the heated argument. The war in Europe also was instrumental in slowing construction because of the difficulty it caused in obtaining steel and other construction materials. A further complication arose as a result of the College's lack of funds. This led to difficulty in paying the general contractor and the materials suppliers. Fortunately for the completion of ARH, although the College fell behind in its payments, and construction slowed on the project Bailey - Marsh was apparently financially strong enough to continue construction of ARH without forcing a major slow-down in construction. However, the financial worsening financial situation of the College became so serious in 1917 and 1918 that Bailey - Marsh, which also had been retained to construct the Men's Quadrangle was on the brink of financial collapse for several months during the latter project. The archives contain many documents from Bailey - Marsh trying to get the College to pay its debts to them.

By January 1916 people had begun to refer to the new building as "Alumni Recitation Hall" or "ARH." In popular usage the abbreviated form of the name sprang up immediately and it has prevailed for well over eight decades.

Some of the distinctive features of ARH were the extra wide corridors, the majestically wide staircases, the beautiful terrazzo finish on the steps of the staircases and corridor floors, and the state-of-the-art (for 1916) gravity ventilation system. In regard to the latter feature, although the building was heated by steam radiators, fresh air was delivered through vertical ducts that ran between the two layers of brick in the walls on each of the two sides of the corridors, a new concept in ventilation for the time that the building was constructed. The flow of air was aided by oversize fans located in a small service area below the first floor of the building.

The building featured a large auditorium designed for college events for which audiences would not be large enough to fill Herrick Chapel. Lectures, oratorical contests, theatrical productions, debates, pep meetings and other such functions were held in the auditorium. ARH also featured a social science "laboratory" equipped with book shelves and special study tables which students of the departments of the social sciences could use for their study. Special reference books in the social sciences were housed in the "lab" and a special librarian was put in charge of maintaining the reference collection. ARH was connected to Carnegie Library by a short corridor.

The first floor of ARH housed English and German. The second floor housed classics, the romance languages, psychology and education. The third floor housed applied Christianity, history, political science, economics, and business administration. The building also had spacious individual offices for the faculty members of the departments housed in it.

ARH was dedicated in November 1916 with an impressive ceremony in Herrick Chapel featuring visiting lecturers and musicians. The first classes to meet in the new ARH did so in January 1917 although the auditorium had not been completed at that time. Thus, ARH began its 80+ years of excellent service to the Grinnell College Community.

In 1942 the College Radio Station (KGRW) was located in the space which had served as the corridor between ARH and Carnegie Library. In 1960, a classroom of ARH was renovated to serve as a language laboratory. It had 24 student work stations, each served by its own audio equipment and linked to a central audio control board designed to aid the students in learning to speak and understand spoken foreign languages offered at the College.

In 1963, ARH Auditorium was redecorated, received new flooring, new seats, blackout window shades for use of projection equipment, and the lighting was modernized so the facility could serve as a comfortable 300 seat lecture hall and as a movie theater for student and faculty use.

In 1969 the Trustees approved an expenditure of \$100,000 over a two-year period to cosmetically upgrade ARH and to improve its electrical service. Dale Hawn, Director of the Physical Plant, designed and implemented the changes. Included among the changes were the installation of acoustical dropped-ceilings in the large classrooms, fluorescent illumination fixtures replaced incandescent fixtures in all rooms. The language laboratory was modernized with new furniture and upgraded sound equipment. In addition, the size of the restrooms was increased, asbestos floor tile was installed in the classrooms and the space in the annex between ARH and Carnegie was renovated to house the writing laboratory.

In 1980 ARH was re-roofed at a cost of \$40,000 and at the same time the mail service area was renovated. However, at the same meeting a recommendation to the Trustees for replacement of all windows in the building at an estimated cost of \$95,000 received no action from the Board.

ARH EXPANSION AND RENOVATION

In 1983, Richard Dober of Dober Associates, a campus-planning firm from Massachusetts was retained to assess the College's physical needs and to develop a plan for possible future construction and landscaping. As a part of his report, Richard Dober stated that ARH "is in less modern condition than most high school classroom buildings in the U. S." He added that the technology of teaching methods had long since passed Grinnell College by in regard to the teaching facilities available in ARH and that, although very sound structurally, the building was so outmoded that it stood as an embarrassment to a college of Grinnell's stature. Dober recommended that ARH should be renovated as soon as possible.

In 1986, President Drake strongly recommended to the Board of Trustees that ARH be renovated. Later that year the Board granted approval the President approval to appoint an architect to develop preliminary plans for renovation of the building. President Drake appointed Ben Weese of Weese, Langley, Weese (the firm that had designed the renovation of Mears Cottage and Burling Library) to develop preliminary ideas for such a renovation. During the next year Ben Weese and the ARH Renovation Planning Committee (composed of fifteen members of the faculty and administration and two students) developed a statement of needs for the renovation. The group then proceeded to develop preliminary plans for the renovation of the building.

During the late 1960s, the 1970s and early 1980s ARH Auditorium had been used as the site for showing recreational films on weekends. During the deliberations of the ARH Renovation Planning Committee, it adopted preliminary plans that included structural changes and changes in user guidelines for ARH Auditorium that would no longer permit the facility to be utilized as the site for showing recreational films on the weekends. This conclusion had been reached due to concerns that the rowdy behavior of some students in prior years during the showing of weekend films, if continued, would soon damage the finishes and decor of the newly renovated auditorium. Both the administration and faculty supported that conclusion and decision.

In October 1986, the tentative plans for the renovation of ARH were outlined in an article in the Scarlet and Black. The article included the plans to eliminate use of the ARH Auditorium as a facility for showing weekend recreational films. Executive Vice President Walker was quoted in the article as having stated that the Administration was considering constructing a "low expense building" to be used for student recreational purposes and particularly for the showing of recreational films.

In February 1987, President Drake recommended to the Trustees that more complete plans be drawn up for the renovation of ARH based on Weese's preliminary design recommendations. Drake announced that arrangements had been made for a negotiated general contract between the College, Weese Langley Weese and Loomis Construction Co. of Cedar Rapids to begin construction whenever the Board approved the initiation of the project. In such an association between architect and general contractor, the contractor's representative works with the architect in the design as well as construction of the project. Theoretically, such an arrangement should function to hold down construction costs. At the following Board Meeting, Weese appeared and distributed hard-line drawings for renovation of ARH which provided for 18 variously configured classrooms, 34 offices in departmental office pods or clusters, a 220 seat auditorium (created by redesigning the upper half of the original auditorium) for public lectures and large classes, and state-of-the-art audiovisual, computer and language laboratories as well as a writing laboratory. Carpeting was added throughout the building and specially designed furniture and light oak added warmth to the interior. The terrazzo finish was retained on the stair

treads and served as a border to the carpet, which was centrally located in the corridors.

With the renovation, air conditioning was installed in the building, an addition made much more easily because of the presence of the ducts from the old gravity ventilation system and which were located in the interior walls of the corridors. All fenestration was replaced with double-hung windows with storms and some with screens in each of the rooms. Weese's plans accounted for an increase in useable space of 3,000 square feet overall without any alteration to the building's exterior dimensions and architectural character. A major feature of the design was the connection of ARH to Carnegie Hall at two levels. Thus, by the use of the ramps and by the introduction of an elevator, both buildings were made accessible to handicapped persons. Thirteen very attractive individual student study carrels were placed at the periphery of each of the ramps. Weese's cost estimate for the plans he presented was initially \$4,811,000 including architectural and engineering fees.

At the February 1987 meeting of the Board, a group of students presented a proposal for a new student recreation center to provide, among other things, a replacement cinema for the ARH Auditorium which they were to lose for films as a result of the proposed renovation. The figure the students presented as an approximate cost estimate for such a facility was \$750,000. A tentative design for such a building was presented by students Cathy Baldwin, Russell Matteson and SGA President Ali El Safar. The proposal included a 500-seat theater, a 6,000 square foot dance floor attended by a 1,500 square foot stage. The administration supported the concept presented but explained to the students that the lack of available funds was a limiting factor to consideration of such a structure at that time.

In May 1987 the Board expressed strong support for the plans for ARH renovation presented by Ben Weese. The Board gave approval to the President to direct Weese to complete the planning for the renovation but stated that the renovation should not proceed before May 1989.

In April 1988, a group of students conducted a 41-hour sit-in demonstration in ARH over a weekend to protest a number of the changes proposed for the renovation but mostly to protest the elimination of ARH as a site for weekend recreational films. The group called into question the administration's commitment to planning a new student center with the statement, "...although the administration claims to be serious about plans for a new student center, little has been done to evidence that commitment."

For more information concerning the proposed new student recreational building see "Harris Center."

On February 12, 1988 Vice President Walker reported to the Board that Weese, Langley, Weese had completed plans for the renovation of ARH at a cost estimated

by Ben Weese to be \$4,400,000. Walker stated that since the renovation would take at least fifteen months the administration was making plans for other sites in which to meet the many classes that had been normally held in ARH.

In May 1989 the meeting places for all classes formerly held in ARH were announced for the 1989-90 academic year. Classes for 1989-90 were scattered among all of the academic buildings as well as several of the residence facilities. Although the State Fire Marshal had stated that Goodnow Hall could not be occupied without significant modification, he granted a waiver for one year to accommodate using it to relieve the need for classroom and office space. Fortunately, the College has a number of residential structures surrounding the campus, which were also used during the year for classes and offices for faculty and the Writing Laboratory. Although the substitute classroom and office sites were not as convenient as were the facilities in ARH that they replaced, the year went surprisingly smoothly for faculty and students whose regular offices and classrooms were lost temporarily to the renovation process. The cooperative attitudes of both faculty and students during that time deserve a great deal of credit.

At the May 1989 Board Meeting, Vernon Faulconer, Chairman of the Buildings and Grounds Committee reported that the estimated cost of the ARH renovation project had increased to \$4,900,000.

Construction began on the ARH renovation as soon as classes ended in the spring of 1989. As had been the case with student carrels in Weese's renovation of Burling Library, he employed mock-ups of faculty offices and student carrels to ensure that the spaces and facilities he was creating were functionally suitable for the purposes for which they had been designed. This was very fortunate because several minor changes had to be made in his original concepts for these facilities after faculty members and students had tried out the mock-ups.

In April 1990, it was reported to the Board that the budget for the project was running significantly above the May 1989 estimate of \$4,900,000 +. Although the grand majority of Grinnell's buildings have always greatly exceeded early cost projections (e.g. the final cost of Loose Residence Hall was over 50% above the early projected estimates), the final cost of ARH was much too high considering earlier estimates. One reason for the "cost creep" was that generally, Weese's cost estimates were much more optimistically low than was the ultimate reality. Another reason for the projected overage was due to the fact that after approval of the original design and the completion of the basic structural renovation of several rooms, a number of faculty members expressed serious dissatisfaction with the structure and furnishing of those rooms. For example, one room that had originally been designed and constructed to feature a single level floor was changed after construction to a multi-level, terraced room as well as with the inclusion of other quite expensive changes. Thus, due to the re-design of these rooms, in essence, the original contract was re-opened, Weese's original fee of \$300,000 was increased to \$366,000 and the very

expensive reconstruction of the rooms brought the final cost to a figure well above what had been projected. Still another reason reason for the over-run was that the cost of finishing, furnishing and equipage was much higher than the architect and the College had estimated in the planning of the project.

In the fall of 1990, students and faculty moved into the completed ARH, much to the satisfaction of all. Weese's great ability to create outstanding functional, comfortable and attractive interior space was evident throughout the building. Strong admiration for the outcome of the renovation was expressed on all sides. The degree of technological improvements in the audiovisual, computer and language laboratories was very striking. The beauty of the wood trim, the carpeting, the color selections, and the furnishings received much acclaim. Faculty members were delighted with the attractiveness and functionality of their offices and the departmental clusters. Clearly, ARH had been converted from a stark early 20th Century facility to a state-of-the-art comfortable and functional classroom facility that would take Grinnell College into the 21st Century.

At the time of this writing, after eight years of heavy use, ARH continues to be admired by the Grinnell College Community. It is clearly a magnificently sound 90 year-old building that is as attractive and functional for modern-use as if it were built yesterday. Once again, as had been the case with Mears Cottage and Burling Library architect Ben Weese deserves a great deal of credit for his very creative design of functional, comfortable and attractive interior space in Grinnell's Alumni Recitation Hall. Certainly the alumni, who contributed the initial \$50,000 for the original construction of ARH would be proud of the way the building has stood the test of time and would admire the design of the building's renovated form.

It is indeed unfortunate that Richard Dober has not had an opportunity to observe how well the renovated design of the building has corrected the problems to which he referred in his 1983 statement concerning ARH and which spurred the College into the action necessary to make such modifications.

Waldo Walker
December 1998