



Restoration of Historic Buildings Underway at STCC

After more than 10 years of Springfield Technical Community College's aggressively pursuing funding to restore two historic buildings, scaffolding has been erected around Quarters 11 and workers are carefully restoring and stabilizing the exterior. "I'm sure that some people wondered if the building was going to collapse before we managed to secure funding," said STCC President Andrew M. Scibelli. "We've had the responsibility of preserving these structures, but not the means of accomplishing that goal."

Now, through a \$714,737 grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the \$2 million project has begun. The college is seeking grant funding to stabilize the remaining building in this project.

Springfield Armory was established by an Act of Congress in 1794 as the nation's first arsenal. Most buildings were constructed in wood until the great fire of March 1824 during which cinders were blown as far away as Rifle Street. Bucket brigades were formed to put out the fire, but were not particularly efficient. Subsequent buildings were constructed of brick.

The Armory closed in April 1968, and in 1974 the 55 acres on a bluff overlooking downtown Springfield became the Springfield Armory National Historic Site. Jurisdiction of the site is divided, with 35 acres constituting the campus of STCC, and the remaining 20 acres, including what is now the Armory Museum, under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service.

Quarters 11, dating from 1808 with a third floor added in 1863, was known as the West Arsenal, and is the oldest building on the National Historic Site. It has been used variously as a barrelhouse, storehouse, arsenal, barracks, and officers club. Quarters 5 & 6, a duplex built in 1870 as a junior officers quarters, was the first building in Springfield created in the French Second Empire style, and contains marble fireplaces and wood strip mosaic floors.

From the time that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts took ownership of these buildings, the college has struggled to maintain them through the limited funding provided for maintenance needs of the entire campus. The graceful white wooden porch of Quarters 11 was once the site of the college's commencement exercises, but over the 37 years of STCC's existence, the building has seriously deteriorated.

The college has pursued numerous grant proposals and funding requests, which raised hopes that were ultimately dashed, generally by fluctuations in the state budget. According to STCC Vice President of Administrative Services, Dr. Janet Wanczyk, "This has been a real long-term effort on the part of President Scibelli. The college has been trying for a long time to get this building fixed. The key was Dr. Scibelli's getting this grant. The fact that the grant was scheduled to expire on June 30, 2003, finally got the project moving." Wanczyk explained that this funding was actually a state appropriation associated with the August 1999 supplemental budget, with an allocation notice sent to STCC on March 31, 2000. The Mass. Historical Commission administered the release of the funds; however, the expiration date of the funds was June 30 2003, which provided the final impetus for the process.

In the summer of 2001, the office of Michael Rosenfeld, Inc., Architects was engaged to conduct a feasibility study of the site, focusing on Quarter 11, Quarters 5 & 6 and also Building 19, commonly known as "the stables" but noted on Armory charts as the long storehouse, which is considered one of the finest examples of a caserne, a combined barracks and stables. When it became apparent that Building 19 "would become the object of additional investigation through an independent effort," partially because of its larger archeological interest, it was removed from the report, to be addressed separately.

The feasibility report was completed in June 2002, and reviewed by the Massachusetts Historical Commission that summer. A "reconnaissance archeological survey" was conducted at the site by the University of Massachusetts Archeological Services, with a draft report submitted at the end of February 2003.

The general contractor for the work is Kronenberger and Sons Restoration, of Middletown, Connecticut. Glenn Winn, project supervisor for Kronenberger, said that the objective of the current work is to restore the exterior of the building and stabilize it to prevent further deterioration. The brickwork will be cleaned and re-pointed, the windows refurbished, and the slate roof repaired and partially replaced. The porches will have to be rebuilt almost entirely.

Winn said the interior of the building will be closed to the elements, and rudimentary improvements will be made to the heating and electrical systems essentially to preserve the building. Renovating inside for college use will require extensive additional funding at some future point.

Gaitan Blais, resident engineer on the project, for the state Division of Capital Asset Management, oversees delivery of proper materials, checks that every aspect of the work is being done properly, makes sure everything is approved by the architect, and checks safety features. Much of the painstaking restoration requires decisions by the Massachusetts Historical Commission, even to the recipe for the mortar used to re-point the bricks. Blais explained that the kind of sand, originally found in Ludlow, and the quantity of it used in mixing the cement, would affect the color.

"This is a beautiful building," said Blais. "We climbed into the attic recently to look at the framing. It's built with native fir, and the roof is pegged. The workmanship is just incredible."

"We are so pleased to see work actually being done on Quarters 11," said Wanczyk. The concerns now will be obtaining the state funding for work on Quarters 5 & 6, and then securing additional funding to at least stabilize the exterior of Building 19."