

## **The Sterling Memorial Library nave reopens following a ‘spectacular’ restoration**



On Monday, August 25, 2014, the magnificent entrance nave in Sterling Memorial Library (SML) reopens to the public, marking the completion of a major restoration project that has returned the nave to its original splendor and brought about improvements that will better serve the needs of library users in the twenty-first century. The restoration was made possible thanks to a generous gift from Richard Gilder '54 and Lois Chiles, who made their gift in honor of President Emeritus Richard C. Levin '74 PH.D. and Jane A. Levin '75 PH.D. Susan Gibbons, University Librarian commented, "We are enormously grateful to Richard Gilder and Lois Chiles for realizing this spectacular restoration, which has returned a cherished landmark to its original beauty and made our library more efficient, intuitive and welcoming. This is a historic day for all those who love and use this magnificent place." The centrality of SML on the Yale campus was the intent of architect James Gamble Rogers B.A. 1889. In designing the building, Rogers incorporated the Collegiate Gothic style that was prevalent on campuses throughout the United States, announcing that Yale, and its library, were world-class institutions that could rival Oxford and Cambridge, even if Yale was younger by several centuries. The windows of the nave, designed by G. Owen Bonawit, reinforced this message by illustrating important events from the history of Yale and of New Haven. But even though its design was gothic, SML opened in 1930 as a modern library that catered to the needs of Yale's faculty and students. Banks of card catalogs filled the entire south aisle of the nave. The circulation desk, often mistaken for an altar by generations of visitors, stopped anyone from entering the bookstacks at a time when they were closed to everyone except library staff. Small "confessionals" near the High Street entrance to SML served as telephone booths. In the eighty-four years since SML first opened its doors, however, much has changed. Computer workstations and other technologies are ubiquitous and provide the means not only to look up the location of library materials, but also to access a rapidly expanding universe of electronic content. The book stacks have been open to members of the Yale community for many years now – the circulation desk no longer needs to serve as a barrier. These and other concerns underscored the planning for the nave restoration, which started in the summer of 2011 with meetings of librarians, faculty members, university planners, students, and administrators. In the fall of that year, the university selected Helpert Architects in New York to lead the restoration. The challenge was to restore the nave in keeping with its 1930 design, while at the same time modernizing the space in a manner that would incorporate services and technologies to better serve library users. "The restoration has shown that the Nave is even more beautiful than we imagined it," said Architect, David Helpert. "What surprised us is how easily the Nave and its peripheral spaces could be adapted to new uses – but integrating all the 21st-century technology? That was a challenge! We think that James Gamble Rogers would be pleased." After the planning process was completed,

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construction got underway in June, 2013, led by Turner Construction Company. Because the nave serves as the primary route to several of the reading rooms and collections in SML, it was essential that part of the nave remained open to library users throughout construction. To make this possible, an enclosed pedestrian tunnel was constructed that connected the High Street entrance with all the other areas on the first floor of SML. Around and above the pedestrian tunnel, scaffolding was erected that completely filled the nave from floor to ceiling. With the scaffolding in place, workers were able to thoroughly clean all of the stone surfaces, clean and restore the plaster and wood ceilings, clean and repair the stained glass windows, install new lighting and environmental controls, and restore the mural painting of Alma Mater. Because all of this activity was hidden by the pedestrian tunnel, a major "reveal" occurred when the tunnel finally came down in May of this year. The results of the restoration are stunning. The newly cleaned stone highlights the contrast in color and texture between alternating blocks of limestone and sandstone. The washed ceilings, brought into focus with new lighting, are now visible as they never were before. More natural light comes into the nave through the cleaned windows. And Alma Mater again reigns over the space, with all of her plaster carvings restored. In addition, there are numerous enhancements to library services. At the beginning of the project, the nave held three service desks – circulation, information, and library privileges. Now all three have been combined at a single service desk in the north aisle of the nave. Some of the built-in card catalogs, a prominent feature of the original nave, have been removed, while others have been preserved in place. The resulting open space now holds computer workstations and seating areas for conversation and study. The number of self-service options in the nave has increased greatly. Library users can now check out their own library materials, scan both paper materials and microfilms, and retrieve materials that are on hold after delivery from other libraries on campus. The new security desk at High Street incorporates upgraded technologies for the protection of users and library materials. The newly restored nave is not only a summons to scholarship but an inspiration for the entire Yale community. "We all know that the library is the heart of the university," said Yale University President Peter Salovey. "I am delighted that this beautiful and inspiring campus space has been renovated to provide better access to Yale's world class collections, and to give students and scholars modern space to study and reflect under the watchful eye of the brilliantly restored painting, Alma Mater. I am doubly-pleased that the space was renovated in honor of Jane and Rick Levin." Sterling Memorial Library will be hosting an

[/calendar.yale.edu/cal/library/month/20140922/All/CAL-2c9cb3cd-47d48665-0147-d50beb0d-00000046bedework@yale.edu](http://calendar.yale.edu/cal/library/month/20140922/All/CAL-2c9cb3cd-47d48665-0147-d50beb0d-00000046bedework@yale.edu) [1]">open house on Thursday, September 18th, 3-5pm to celebrate the reopening of the restored nave. Staff will be on hand to give informal tours and refreshments will be served. All are welcome! To see a photographic journey of the nave restoration, click [here](#) [2] For further information about the restoration of the Sterling Memorial Library nave, contact Kendall Crilly, Associate University Librarian for Program Development & Research [kendall.crilly@yale.edu](mailto:kendall.crilly@yale.edu) [3]. Press and Media, contact Amanda Patrick, Director of Communications [amanda.patrick@yale.edu](mailto:amanda.patrick@yale.edu) [4] 203-432-4484 **Yale University Library** One of the world's leading research libraries, the Yale University Library fosters intellectual growth and supports the teaching and research missions of the university and scholarly communities worldwide. Its resources include more than 15 million volumes and information in all media, ranging from ancient papyri to early printed books, and from digital collections to electronic databases. **Sterling Memorial Library** Built with funds from the bequest of John W. Sterling B.A. 1864, and designed by architect James Gamble Rogers B.A. 1889, Sterling Memorial Library opened in 1930. In designing the building, Rogers wanted the library to be centrally located on the Yale campus. He chose to incorporate the Collegiate Gothic style that was prevalent on campuses throughout the United States. The architectural elements in the entrance nave are reminiscent of gothic cathedral architecture. The windows of the nave, which were designed by G. Owen Bonawit, illustrate important events from the history of Yale and of New Haven.

**External link:** [http://www.library.yale.edu/librarynews/2014/08/the\\_sterling\\_memorial\\_library\\_1...](http://www.library.yale.edu/librarynews/2014/08/the_sterling_memorial_library_1...) [5]

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