



RAUNER SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY IN WEBSTER HALL, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

Architects: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Location: Hanover, NH

Client: Dartmouth College

Area: 37,000 gsf

Construction Cost: \$7,475,000

Completion: 2000



In 1901, Charles A. Rich designed Dartmouth’s main auditorium building, which was supplanted in the 1960s by a separate performance facility and thereafter sat underutilized on an important site facing the campus green. VSBA’s challenge was to transform the building into an accessible, functional, and visually evocative library with 30,000 linear feet of rare books and manuscripts housed in a secure and carefully controlled environment. In addition, the scope of the renovation was to include a reading room, study and seminar rooms, offices, and technical support spaces.

VSBA’s architectural design solution preserves the monumental interior hall as the reading room. As the original exterior walls of the building could not effectively provide thermal and moisture protection for the controlled collections space without substantial modifications, an aluminum and glass curtainwall enclosure was designed to create a transparent “building within a building.” This glazed “lantern” of bookstacks maintains temperature and humidity levels for the sensitive collection, protecting them in a vapor-tight “conservation” environment while making them more visually accessible.

The reading room accommodates 36 users and is surrounded by shelves of reference materials. Office and seminar rooms beneath the balconies are acoustically isolated to allow groups the use of collections with contemporary audio and visual media. Above, the mezzanine provides students with a comfortable, quiet study area, with views from the large windows to the surrounding campus, lending an outward focus to a building that had formerly been oriented towards an interior stage. Administration and technical services are located on the lower level, and compacting stacks form an underground link to the main library. Obsolete components of the original building, such as the raked balcony floors and a projection booth, were removed to increase natural light and a feeling of openness. Decorative plaster elements were restored to preserve a sense of the original interior while accommodating current needs.





VSBA used lighting to reinforce the dialogue between the original building and the new. Old theatrical lighting was replaced with a fiber optic system, similar in appearance to the original incandescent bulbs but more energy efficient and accessible from the attic above for relamping. Downlights recessed in the ceiling coffers provide ambient light and are supplemented by task lighting on study tables and bookshelves within the reading room. Inside the curtainwall enclosure, collections are washed with light to create a glow within the reading room and dramatically reinforce the importance of the collections.

The new special collections library is a dialogue between the original neoclassical and the new. The machine-like curtainwall is juxtaposed with gentle detailing on the walls, ceiling, and balcony front, while the millwork and curtainwall relate to the original building's variety of scales. Once used only for special events, Webster Hall now welcomes students as well as a variety of other users, and has become a vital part of both campus and community life.

Awards: National Honor Award, AIA, 2002; Illumination Design Award, The Illuminating Engineering Society of North America, 2000





Mezzanine



Mezzanine



Mezzanine and computers