Lincoln Hall

As the University continues to expand to meet the needs of a growing student body with state-of-the-art facilities, it honors its rich history through many preservation projects across campus. The $8.5 million renovation of Lincoln Hall is part of a campus-wide commitment to historical preservation that totals approximately $26 million invested in renovation of a number of historic structures, including Palmer Engineering and Thompson Hall.

Lincoln Hall, one of the most iconic buildings on the University of Nevada, Reno campus, recently turned 120 years old.

Opened in 1896, Lincoln Hall served as the first men’s dormitory and housed nearly 20,000 students until it was closed as a residence hall in May 2015. Through the years, it went through a series of renovations to ensure the facility met the needs of its residents, including updates to the plumbing and electrical systems. Recently, however, concerns about the integrity of the building in the event of an earthquake, in addition to other safety concerns, necessitated a more radical renovation plan.

The primary safety concern the building faced was the use of unreinforced masonry that was common at the time of its construction. The walls of Lincoln Hall contained no rebar or steel, leaving the building vulnerable to large earthquakes.

“Lincoln Hall was in critical need of a ‘life safety’ retrofit to ensure the safety of its occupants and those who walk near this historic building,” Graham Kent, director of the Nevada Seismological Laboratory, said. “During the process of

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retrofit, it became clear that Lincoln Hall had no basic ability to sustain lateral shear or motion from a significant earthquake. That scenario is no longer the case as significant effort has been done to give it lateral strength, the reduction of peeling bricks and other life-saving measures.”

“Working with the State Historical Preservation Office, the Nevada Seismological Laboratory and a design agent who specializes in historic structures, the University devised a plan not only to address seismic and safety concerns, but also mechanical, plumbing, phone and data improvements. Further, the renovations incorporate Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant access upgrades.

“Our local architects worked with experts in historical preservation structural engineering and architects who specialize in protecting the historically significant components of the building,” John Walsh, director of Capital Improvement Projects and project manager, said. “We’ve retained the legacy of the building through this process—repairing and reinforcing the brick structure, replacing some of the original components lost over time. We’re matching original colors and other design features.”

After the completion of these extensive renovations, begun in Dec. 2015, Lincoln Hall was reopened as office space for faculty and students in the College of Liberal Arts in Fall 2016, specifically housing members of the sociology, communication studies and history departments.

“By ‘living’ in this newly renovated and celebrated space, I feel connected to the long history of this University, and of my own discipline. This historic setting serves to remind me that my own seemingly ‘cutting edge’ ideas are inextricably linked to centuries of social-scientific theory and research,” Marta Elliott, professor and interim chair of sociology, said about her new office in Lincoln Hall. “I am delighted each time I hear that someone I know actually lived here, like Professor Emeritus Jim Hulse, and sharing our impressions of this marvelous space.”

Former Lincoln Hall resident and History Professor Emeritus Jim Hulse ’52 (journalism), ’58 M.A. (history) toured the new space at the reopening reception Oct. 6. A native Nevadan, former member of the Nevada State Advisory Board for Historic Preservation and Archeology, and an inductee in the Nevada Writers Hall of Fame, Professor Hulse has been part of the Wolf Pack for nearly 70 years. Of Lincoln Hall’s renovations, he said, “I’m very impressed. They have kept the same structure and layout as was there when I lived in Lincoln in 1948. The new dorms [in Peavine Hall] are so much more upscale, with private bathrooms and showers. They have really made good use of this space.”

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After extensive improvements designed to address seismic and safety concerns, the dorm rooms in Lincoln Hall have been repurposed to serve as faculty offices for the departments of sociology and history.