A campus icon is returning better than ever with the start of the new school year. Venerable Graves Hall is reopening later this month after a year-long, $5.7 million, adaptive restoration that has emphasized a return to the building’s original character while updating the 19th-century landmark for use in the 21st.

Dedicated in 1894, Graves was constructed as the college’s chapel and library, but ceased serving as first one and then the other when Dimnent Memorial Chapel and Van Zoeren Library opened in 1929 and 1961 respectively. Renovations in 1962 and 1980 reconfigured the building for new use, but at the expense of much of its beauty.

In both updating and restoring the historic structure, the latest work has been informed by original blueprints as well as photographs and even living memory. Remade are the distinctive art-glass windows that were once a fixture in Winants Auditorium, a connection to the space’s original use as Hope’s chapel but removed in 1980 due to their deterioration. As when the building opened in 1894, the second floor features four large classrooms, the varnished wooden doors and wainscoting newly installed but suggesting the classic elegance of a bygone era. The main staircase, isolated behind metal doors in the 1962 redo, again greets visitors to the main lobby. As prior to the restoration, the ground floor of the building will continue to house the Upward Bound and Children’s After School Achievement (CASA) programs, as well as the Schoon Meditation Chapel, all in improved space.

A major new addition—built of stone to match the rest of the building and facing the Pine Grove—includes an elevator that provides access for the first time to the top and ground floors for those with mobility impairments. Other features where the library stacks once stood include an additional classroom and the “Presidents’ Room” conference room featuring portraits of all of Hope’s presidents. Additional amenities undreamed-of when the structure was built include wireless Internet service and wiring throughout for access to the complete array of technologies that exist in support of education. And air conditioning.

(Attention to Detail)

Newly restored Graves Hall stands ready for the start of classes this fall.

Clockwise from upper left: scrollwork in Winants; the view from a classroom; the art glass rebuilt; wired for technology; west tower nook; the main stairway awaits arrivals from College Avenue; Winants seating, echoing the original 1890s Chapel configuration.

(Photos by Lou Schakel ’71)