One of Hope’s oldest and most distinctive buildings is being brought into the modern era while at the same time being returned to its original glory in an “adaptive restoration” that began earlier this spring.

Site preparation for the work at historic Graves Hall, which contains classrooms, meeting rooms and offices, started in February, including the temporary removal of the signature “Hope College” arch from in front of the building to provide access for construction equipment, with major work beginning earlier this month. The project, which will total $5.7 million, is scheduled for completion by the beginning of the spring 2009 semester.

Dedicated in 1894, Graves was constructed as the college’s chapel and library in addition to originally housing four classrooms on the second floor. Graves, which has continued to serve as a classroom building in more recent years, is Hope’s third-oldest building (after Van Vleck Hall and the President’s Home).

“Graves Hall is a vital historic building as well as a beautiful one,” said Dr. Elliott Bergh, ’50, an expert on Hope’s history and researcher with the college’s A.C. Van Raalte Institute. “One reason that Graves is so important is that it’s really the front door of the college.”

The project has been planned to restore the character of the building as it existed before a major interior renovation in the 1960s while also meeting contemporary standards for access, safety and use, according to Greg Maybury, director of operations.

“The project is an ‘adaptive restoration,’” Maybury said. “We’re trying to get as true a restoration of the interior as we can but also make it as well-suited as possible for current needs. It’s a beautiful building with a rich history that we hope to honor and that we hope students and visitors will enjoy as they learn and attend events there.”

Graves was built to house the college’s chapel, named Winants Chapel, and library because Hope had outgrown the two locations previously serving that purpose, and served in those roles until it, too, was outgrown.

Winants remained the college’s chapel until Dimnent Memorial Chapel was constructed in 1929, and Graves served as the college’s library until Van Zorens Library (also since replaced) was completed in 1941.

The former Winants Chapel became part of the library in Graves after Dimnent Chapel was completed, and after the library moved out Graves was renovated in 1982 to provide more classroom space. Also during the 1982 renovation, the former chapel became a general-use auditorium, which was renovated in 1986.

Graves has housed a variety of Hope programs and departments since the 1962 renovation, and most recently was the headquarters of the department of modern and classical languages for many years until that program moved into the new Martha Miller Center for Global Communication in August 2005. Graves is also the home of the Children’s After School Achievement (CASA) and Upward Bound programs, which have relocated for the construction but will return when the project is finished.

The interior work will undo many of the 1962 and 1980 changes, and has been informed by original blueprints from the college’s collection in the Joint Archives of Holland.

When the auditorium was next renovated in 1986, the deteriorating stained glass from the building’s chapel days was removed and the seating was angled toward the southwest instead of the south. The project will include restoring stained glass to the auditorium’s windows based on surviving samples and reorienting the seating to the original southern facing of the chapel era. The seating will drop to 163 from 190, but will include additional space for wheelchairs.

Also in the 1962 renovation, some of the larger spaces were divided to create additional classrooms and office space on both floors, including the addition of a knee-walled second floor within the high-ceilinged northern end where the library stacks had been.

The smaller classrooms and meeting rooms that were carved out of the central part of the main floor in 1962 are also being reconfigured. The former “Presidents’ Room” immediately inside the main western entrance, which prior to 1962 had been a study above and since was a conference room which housed portraits of A.C. Van Raalte and past Hope presidents, will become a gathering and pre-function area for the main auditorium.

Another large classroom will be created on the northwest side of the lobby. The main floor will also include enlarged and improved restrooms as well as a small kitchen for events in the building.

The 1960s-era interior walls and the added second floor that divided the northern end were being removed and replaced by a large, single-story room that will occupy most of the space.

The CASA and Upward Bound programs will both continue to reside in the building’s lower level, although they will each gain space from portions of the level formerly used as offices for campus departments.

The lower level will also continue to house the small Schoon Midrotation Chapel created in the 1960s by the time this photo was taken sometime after the middle of the 20th century, Winants Chapel had become a library reading room. The restoration will include installing new stained glass windows. The originals were removed in 1980.

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~ Greg Maybury, Director of Operations