

The Union Building: History and Architecture



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Keweenaw National
Historical Park



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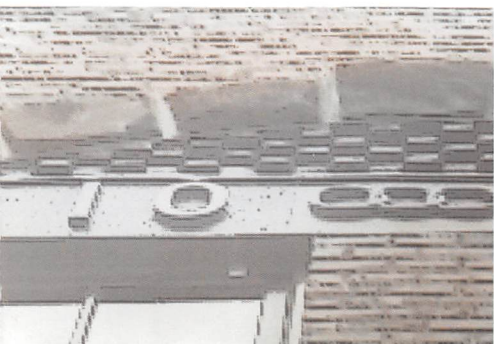
Calumet, MI 49913

Website: www.nps.gov/kewe

Keweenaw National Historical Park was established to preserve and interpret the natural and cultural resources related to the copper mining industry for the enjoyment and benefit of current and future generations through cooperative efforts and partnerships with state and local governments, public, and private entities.

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

The Union Building: History and Architecture



Keweenaw National Historical Park

Introduction

The Calumet Visitor Center is located in a former lodge hall known as the Union Building. Planning for the structure began in 1888, when a group of local men formed “the Union Building Association” to raise money for its construction. The men were members of two fraternal groups—the Free and Accepted Masons and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows—who saw value in sharing a lodge hall and combining forces to construct it. Their partnership inspired the name of the association and the building itself. The Union Building has been a prominent and notable structure since it opened in 1889, not only because of its size and corner location, but also because of the events that took place inside.



The three-story building was designed to accommodate a lot of activity. The ground floor was rented to commercial tenants, and the rent they paid helped cover the costs of the building’s upkeep. Over the years, passersby could peer through the large storefront windows into the interior, which at times housed a bank, post office, printing company, beauty salon, and more. The Masons and Odd Fellows used a separate entrance to reach the upper floors, where they held meetings and practiced rituals: the staircase and well-shuttered windows helped create literal and figurative separation from the street-level world below. Many other fraternal, ethnic, and benevolent groups rented the upper floors, too; regular meetings were held by the Knights of Pythias, Ancient Order of Hibernians, and Daughters of Rebekah, among others.

The Union Building illustrates the relationship between the community of Calumet and the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company (C&H). The lodge hall was built on company-owned land between the Village of Calumet and the mine site; clearly, C&H's managers approved of and supported fraternal societies. In fact, many of C&H's employees were members in one or more of the lodges that met in the Union Building. The company recognized that fraternal societies served important economic and social functions during the late 1800s and early 1900s, particularly in mining communities like Calumet. Being a member of a group like the Masons and Odd Fellows came with tangible benefits—including financial aid in case of injury, and for widows in case of death—which were important in the era before health insurance and worker's compensation programs. Membership also provided an opportunity to socialize and form connections with people, which was appealing to newcomers establishing lives in a new community. Fraternal groups often had ladies' auxiliaries, including the Order of the Eastern Star and the Royal Neighbors of America, which both met in this building. They offered women affordable insurance and an opportunity to form their own social networks.

In addition to lodge meetings, the upper floors hosted wedding receptions, recitals, high school graduation parties, and other functions. It continued to be used by the community until the 1970s, when it was sold to a private individual. Years of neglect, compounded by water damage from a leaking roof, began to take their toll and the structure began to deteriorate. Watching it decline, and knowing the building's historic importance, the local community advised the National Park Service (NPS) to acquire it for use in interpreting Calumet's social history.

The NPS was able to purchase the building in 1999. The first phase of its rehabilitation addressed the exterior: in 2005, local contracting crews repaired the bricks and mortar; restored the storefront window openings; installed a new cornice; and replaced the roof. This prevented further damage from occurring to the interior. Designing the next phase—the interior rehabilitation—began in 2007. At the same time, the park received funding to plan its first permanent exhibit and visitor information facility, to be located at the Union Building. This enabled the park to coordinate the two projects, but also presented a design challenge: meeting the expectations of the modern visitor, while at the same time respecting the historic architecture of the building.



Balancing visitor expectations and historical integrity was the primary design objective. The NPS follows the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, and works with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to ensure that projects do not diminish or destroy the qualities that make historic buildings, structures, and landscapes significant. Throughout the design and construction phases of the interior rehabilitation, project architects and engineers collaborated with cultural resource specialists from the park and other NPS offices to apply these preservation standards. Visitor needs were considered equally carefully. Finding the right place to install the elevator and second stair was one instance in which the park weighed modern code requirements with preservation goals. The preferred alternative incorporated new wall openings, selective removal of architectural fabric, and repurposing existing rooms in the Union Building's southeast corner. In an effort to document these changes, the park has retained original building material in its museum collection. The Calumet Visitor Center represents Keweenaw National Historical Park's mission: it provides an opportunity to learn about the community's history in a building where it unfolded, and illustrates the goals of historic preservation.



EXTERIOR

Cornice

A pressed metal cornice caps the top of the Union Building's brick masonry wall on the south and west facades. It is attached to a wood frame, serves to protect the top of the wall, and adds architectural distinction to the building's exterior. At the time of the building's construction in 1889, pressed metal cornices could be ordered from a catalog, and because they were shipped and installed in pieces, they were an affordable alternative to the wood or stone which they were intended to simulate. When the NPS acquired the building in 1998, the south cornice was in disrepair and the west cornice had been completely removed. As part of the 2005 exterior rehabilitation, the existing cornice was restored and repainted, and a new cornice was installed on top of the west façade. The reproduction was based on an analysis of historic photographs and molds made from the existing cornice's brackets and rosettes.

Terra Cotta

Most of the upper story window openings on the Union Building's west façade incorporate terra cotta tile below the sandstone segmental arches. The middle windows feature terra cotta designs that include symbols relating to the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the Free and Accepted Masons. Reddish-brown terra cotta tiles adorn many Calumet storefronts, and complement the red brick and locally quarried red sandstone that is characteristic of the historic district.

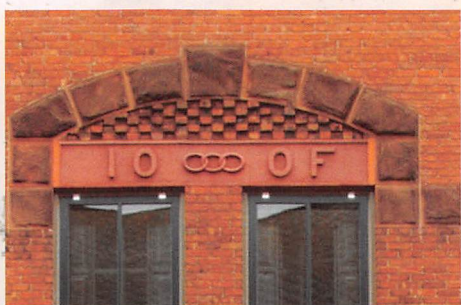
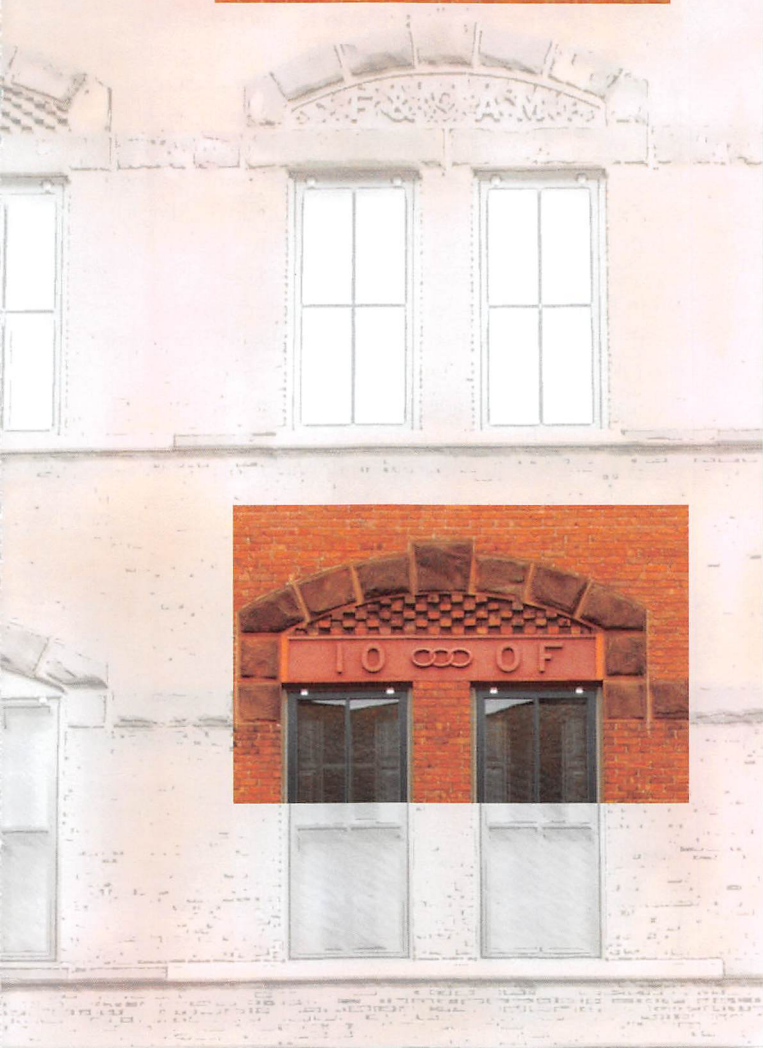
Fire Escape

The metal fire escape mounted to the north façade is a prominent exterior feature when approaching the building from Fifth Street. It is not known when the fire escape was installed, but it appears to have been a later improvement intended to provide a second means of exit from the Union Building's upper floors. Current fire safety codes have rendered it obsolete.

Although the north side of the building and fire escape

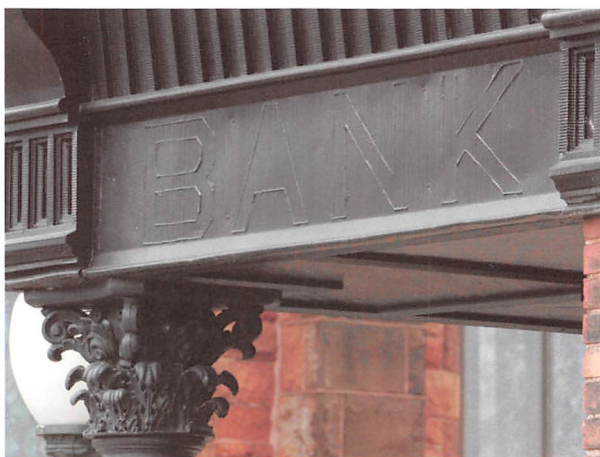


are currently exposed, they were for a period of time hidden by the structure that once stood next door: the Calumet YMCA. This three-story neoclassical building was constructed in 1908 and demolished in the 1940s.



Signs

The Union Building has been an ideal backdrop for signs over the years. The square metal lanterns that project from the west façade are reproductions of early lighted signs. They were originally used by fraternal lodges to announce which organization was meeting on any given evening: members were able to reach through the window and change glass panels that were inscribed or painted with lodge insignia. The neon sign mounted to the north façade was clearly intended to supersede the lantern and bring a sense of modernity to the Masonic gatherings. Large billboard-sized painted signs once covered broad expanses of the Union Building's north and south façades. Remnants of the sign for the Keweenaw Printing Company are still legible on the south facade, but previous owners painted over the north façade sign. Rather than repaint these "ghost signs," the NPS has opted to let them weather with time. Another example of ghosting remains on the metal cornice over the corner entrance: the Merchants and Miners Bank left an enduring reminder of its presence after it vacated the building in 1906 and moved to a new address at 200 Fifth Street.



Cast Iron Storefront

In addition to the large expanse of plate glass and wood framing, the Union Building's storefront is characterized by its cast iron columns and entrance platforms. Similar to pressed metal building parts, these components could be ordered from a catalog, and came in a variety of sizes, styles, and configurations. Note that the columns on the two storefronts have an identical arrangement and spacing, with the exception that the south storefront does not incorporate a recessed entrance. Rather, the south commercial space is entered at the corner which is supported by a free-standing cast iron column with flutes and a Corinthian capital.



Landscape

Urban features and planted areas characterize the Union Building's setting. The paved service drive along the north was once an alley that separated the Union Building from the YMCA, which was removed in the 1940s. Concrete sidewalks with curbs and street lights define the site on the south and west edges. The shade trees and white cedar hedge row (*arborvitae*) to the south and east are remnants from the 1920 plan for Agassiz Park, a community recreation area to the east.

Commissioned by C&H, the park was designed by the renowned landscape architect Warren Manning as a grand commons area, and included flower gardens, a tennis court, baseball diamond, and other features.

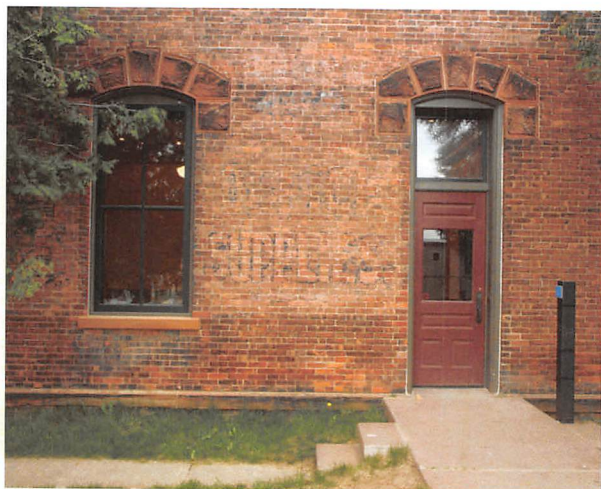
The Union Building gradually became separated from the park by Fourth Street, a former alley which was broadened and paved over time.

Accessible Route and Entrance

Historically, visitors would have entered the building through the storefront doors on Fifth Street or one of the two sets of double doors at the southwest corner.

One set opened into the ground floor commercial space, while the other led up a set of stairs to the lodge rooms on the upper floors. The 2005 exterior rehabilitation project provided two entry points: the south-facing double doors on the corner, and the door located midway along the south façade. Both entrances will lead visitors directly to the visitor reception desk, which is situated between these two points of entry.

The south façade entrance has been configured to meet barrier-free design requirements, and is linked to accessible parking spaces located along Fourth Street to the east.

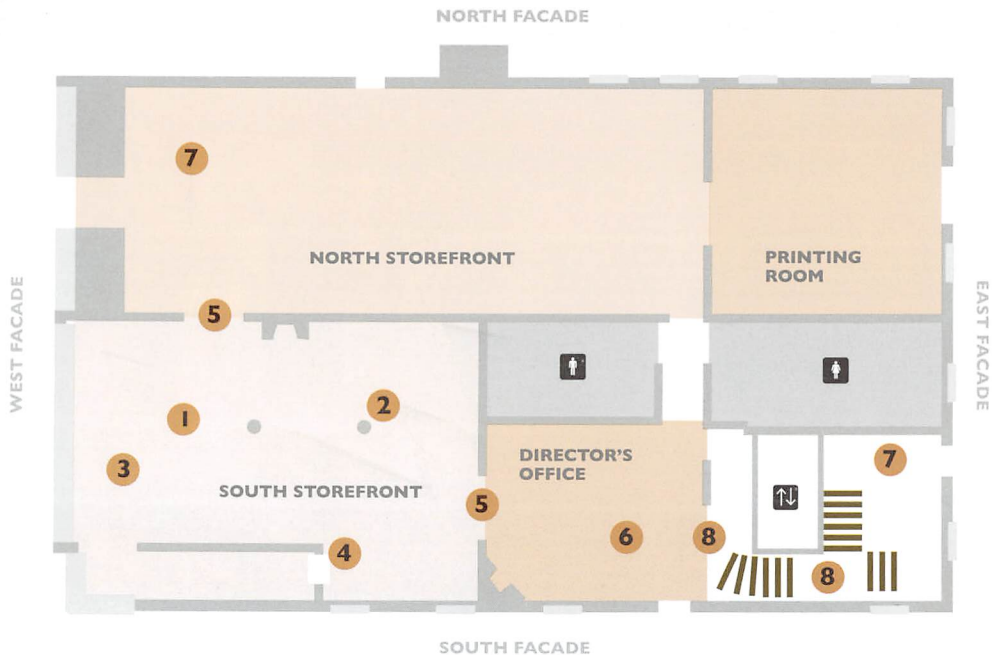




FIRST FLOOR

- 1 South storefront pressed metal ceiling
- 2 Faux marble painting on iron column
- 3 Floor tile
- 4 Lincrusta border and pressed metal cornice and ceiling
- 5 New and modified interior wall openings
- 6 Parquet floor
- 7 Light fixtures
- 8 Elevator and second stair

FIRST FLOOR



Architectural vignettes located throughout the building are another means by which the NPS seeks to honor the building's history. Decorative painters offered their painting services to businesses and private home owners; their work added distinction and refinement to interior spaces. A skilled artist created the ornamental painting effects that were uncovered at the Union Building during the course of rehabilitating the structure. Over time, these original decorative motifs were buried under layers of paint and wall papers. In an effort to provide a glimpse into these earlier room finishes, the Union Building contains small mock-up studies or vignettes that provide a window into the bold colors and ornament of the past.



South storefront pressed metal ceiling

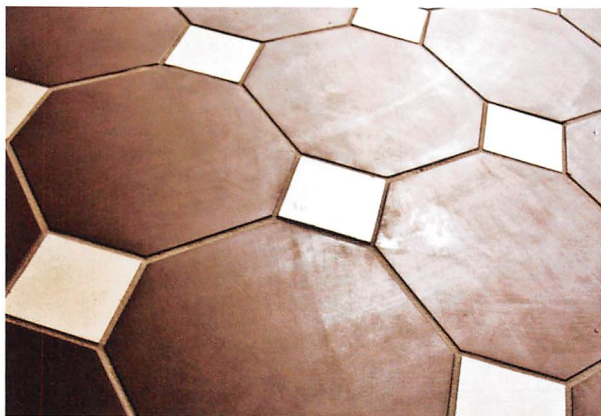
The ceiling in the South Storefront is covered in interlocking pressed metal panels. At the time of the Union Building's construction, manufacturers produced pressed metal ceilings in a variety of patterns and designs. The pressed metal ceiling complemented the paneled oak wainscot to create a higher level of finish as befitting a bank interior.

Vignette: Faux marble painting on cast iron column

As seen in the historic photograph on page 13, both of the room's free standing cast iron columns once had a full marbled effect. Paint sampling and analysis performed by an architectural conservator confirmed that the marbling incorporated red-browns and gold tones with random veining. The vignette on the north side of the east column captures the essence of the original faux finish, which was intended to replicate imported Italian marble.

Floor tile

The bold geometric design dates to 1889 and the first tenants of the south storefront, the Merchants and Miners Bank. The original tile floor was selected for its visual impact and durability in the public area of the bank, in front of the teller windows. It was removed by previous owners, but was replicated during the interior rehabilitation with similar tiles based on cues in a historic photograph and remaining physical evidence.







Vignette: Lincrusta border and pressed metal cornice and ceiling

The room's original multicolor paint scheme appears as various tones of gray in the historic photograph, but analysis revealed that bright hues of semi-transparent glazes were applied over base colors of white and light tan to achieve gradated tones of ochre and coral. The ceiling is pressed metal and the ornate border at the top of wall is "Lincrusta," a thick wallpaper with an embossed relief pattern.

New and modified interior wall openings

One of the challenges in converting the ground floor of a two-part commercial building for use as a visitor center involved satisfying new requirements for visitor circulation. Historically, the two commercial spaces on the first floor would have been separate and distinct spaces. As a visitor center, however, the entire first floor needed to function as an integrated space while retaining its historic character. The new opening in the masonry bearing wall that divides the north and south spaces allows visitors to move freely between rooms. Likewise, the door opening between the South Storefront and the Director's Office was originally a single door with a transom window. During the rehabilitation, it was widened to incorporate a double door.



Parquet floor

The oak floor in the Director's Office is arranged in radial bands, with an ornate parquet border incorporating walnut, cherry, and maple inlays. The original floor was deteriorated beyond repair after more than a century of wear; it was removed and recreated during the interior rehabilitation.



Light fixtures

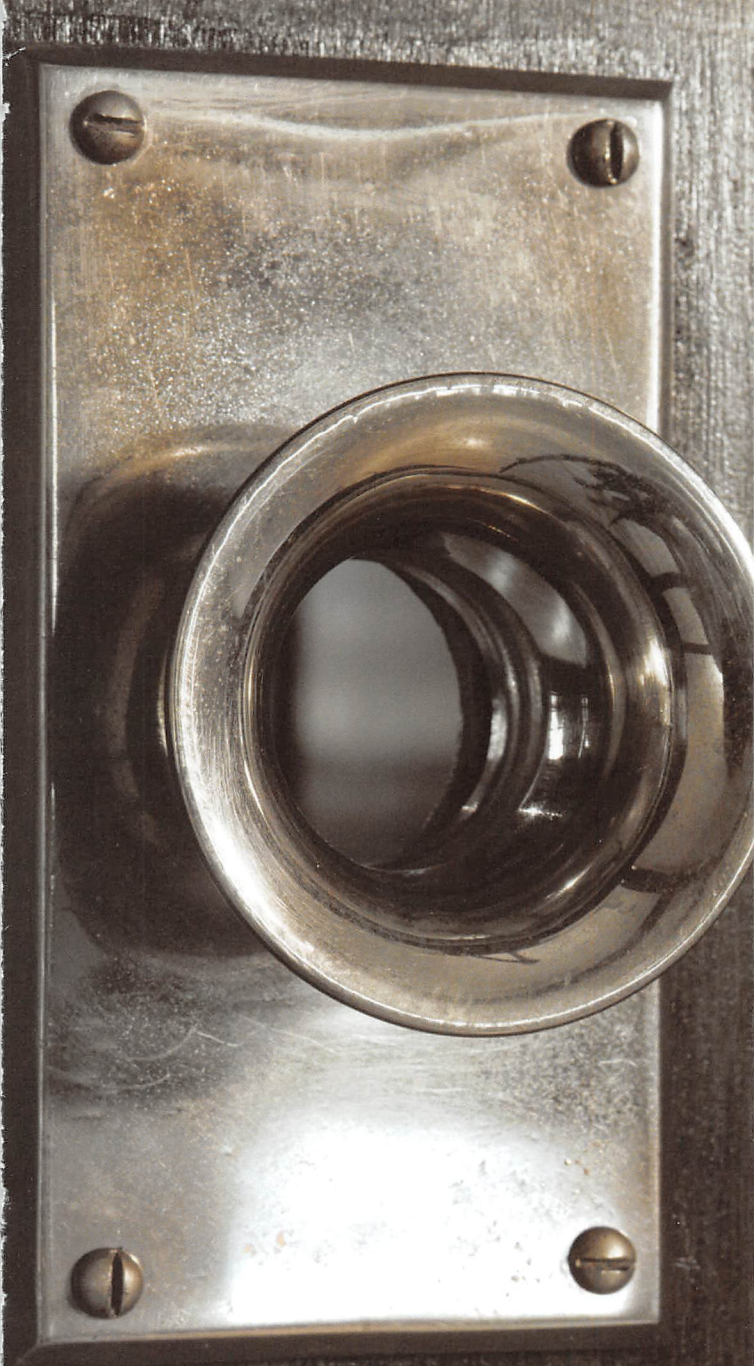
The pendant and wall sconce light fixtures throughout the building are all reproductions, based on either historical photographs or the remnants of historic fixtures that remained in the building when it was acquired by the NPS. The period lighting contributes to the character of interior spaces and clearly contrasts with the modern adjustable LED lamps used to illuminate exhibits.



Elevator and second stair

During the interior rehabilitation, the most significant alteration was the installation of an elevator and second stair for improved access and egress. Floor joists and partition walls were removed, and the Union Building's southeast corner was reconfigured to provide vertical circulation, connecting all levels. This change was made only after analyzing conceptual alternatives that included, among others, an exterior building addition. In the end, it was decided that the most efficient and cost effective approach involved consolidating these new features within the building footprint. On the first floor, the space now occupied by the elevator and new stair had at one time served as an art gallery and later a work shop for the Keweenaw Printing Company. Directly above, the second and third floor each had a small kitchen that served lodge hall gatherings.

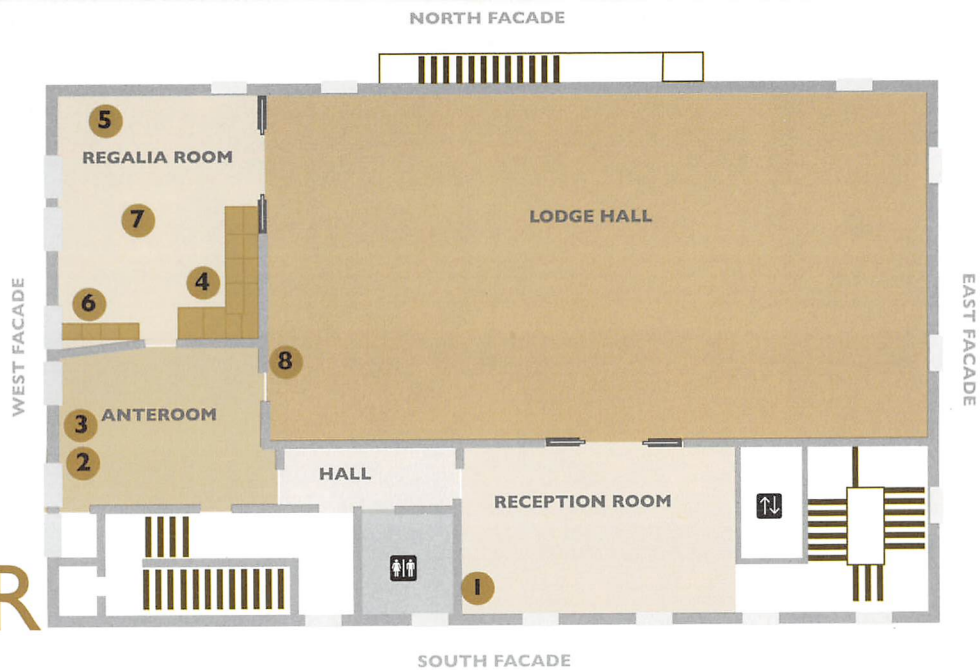




SECOND FLOOR

- 1** Ivy wall stencil
- 2** Wall stencil
- 3** Cigar tray
- 4** Closets
- 5** Wainscot panels
- 6** Wallpaper
- 7** Ceiling panels
- 8** Dimmer switch

SECOND FLOOR



This floor was used by the Odd Fellows. The exhibit may obscure some of the floor's original purpose and make it harder to experience how Odd Fellows used the space in the past, but there are clues that suggest each room's function. Members often gathered for a meal in the Reception Room. Then they would enter the Anteroom to prepare before lodge meetings; members could enter the lodge hall directly from the Anteroom, but candidates for membership moved into the Regalia Room next door to make additional preparations. Meetings and rituals were held in the lodge hall. Historically, the order in which members moved between these rooms was important, but the exhibit has been designed to encourage visitors to flow freely between rooms and exhibit portals.



Wood trim

In 1915, the Odd Fellows redecorated the entire second floor. All of the original molded trim and decorative corner blocks were removed, and replaced with new Arts and Crafts-inspired wood trim with a flat, unembellished profile. In addition, multi-paneled doors were replaced with simpler two-paneled doors, three quarter-height wainscot panels were added, and most noticeably, the ceilings were fitted with new decorative boxed beams. The beam cavity was the ideal place to conceal the fire suppression lines that were installed as part of the NPS's interior rehabilitation. As a point of comparison, the existing third floor wood trim is probably identical to the wood trim that was originally installed on the second floor.

Reception Room

Vignette: wall stencil

The small rectangular vignette in the room's southwest corner exposes a stenciling design of trailing ivy that was created when the second floor lodge hall rooms were redecorated in 1915. During the 2011 rehabilitation, artists highlighted the original stenciled border with a thin layer of paint to make the design more visible.

Vignette: wall stencil

The panel located at the top of the west wall preserves the field color, borders, and stenciling that was part of the interior improvements made in 1915. The multicolored design incorporates three linked rings, which is symbolic of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.





Anteroom

Coat hooks line the walls of the Anteroom and the adjoining corridor. Here, lodge members and candidates removed outerwear before proceeding into the lodge hall or to the Regalia Room to make additional preparations. The doorbell and peepholes each played a role in various lodge rituals and procedures. The brass-covered shelf on the west wall indicates that cigar smoking was a common habit. However, little is known about the compartment and small door above the wainscot on the south wall other than its likely use for storage. Note that the north wall has a slight angle; this appears to have been the result of a difference in alignment between the interior partition wall layout and the window placement. The same skewed wall configuration is seen on the third floor.



Wood shutters

Assembled with paneled sections and operable louvers, the wood shutters are original to the building and were once installed in virtually every window opening. Because of their fragile condition, the few remaining shutters are not suitable for everyday use. To give a sense of their effect, the shutters in the Anteroom and Regalia Room have been restored, while other windows throughout the building have been fitted with light-screening shades to minimize UV damage to museum collections, exhibits, and architectural finishes.



Regalia Room

The closets that line the Regalia Room's east wall appear to pre-date the 1915 interior redecoration. The ornate trim, cornice, and bull's eye corner blocks are characteristic of Eastlake-style furnishings popular in the late 1800s. This design movement was initiated by architect Charles Eastlake and was known for its emphasis on geometric ornament. Closets also once lined the north wall, but were removed by previous owners. The bench on the south wall was also likely used for regalia or object storage.



Wainscot panels

The vertical wainscot panels in the Regalia Room are covered with new burlap fabric, which replicates the original wall covering that had deteriorated beyond repair. Burlap was once a common wall surface treatment: it offered a textural contrast from wall paper or painted plaster and was a good fit with the simplified appearance of the Arts and Crafts-style wood trim that characterizes the second floor.



Vignette: wallpaper

Layers of wallpaper provide a graphic timeline in the vignette located at the top of the south wall above the bench seat. The original light blue layer is distemper paint that was made from powdered chalk or lime, sizing (glue made from hides), and pigment. Like tempera paint, it is water soluble and cannot be washed, which is almost certainly why it was covered by a layer of red wallpaper. More wallpapers and decorative edge borders were applied over the years.



Vignette: ceiling panels

The plaster ceilings between the decorative wood beams are covered by canvas panels with a hand stenciled border. These original panels were removed, cleaned and restored, and then reinstalled as part of the building's interior rehabilitation.

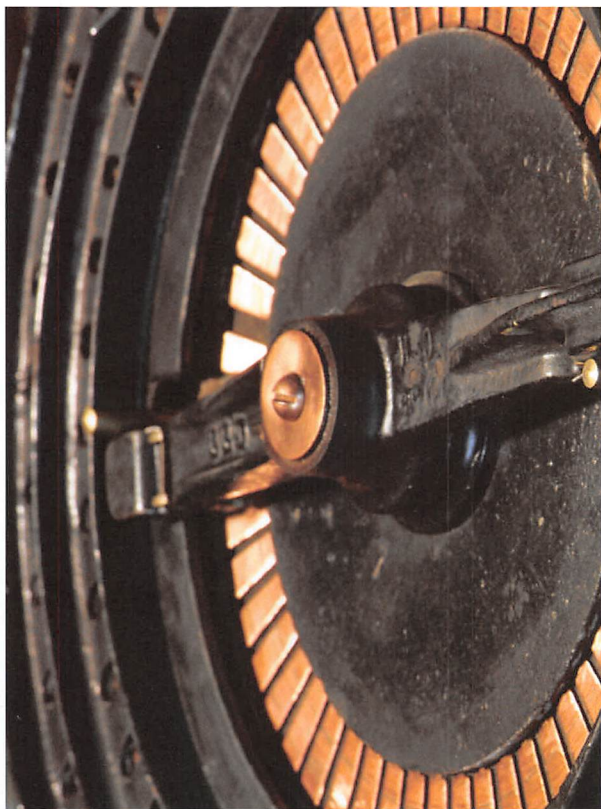


Lodge Hall

As part of the 1915 upgrades to the Odd Fellows lodge hall, the large door openings on the south and west walls were fitted with pocket doors that glided on an overhead track and into the wall cavity when opened. Popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s, pocket doors were used extensively in residential buildings as a means to create privacy between adjoining spaces. Because they eliminated door swings, they were also an effective space-saving solution.

Vignette: Dimmer switch

The large, metal circular device in the south corner on the west wall is an early dimmer switch. Operated by a hand lever, it was used for dramatic effect during lodge rites and rituals.

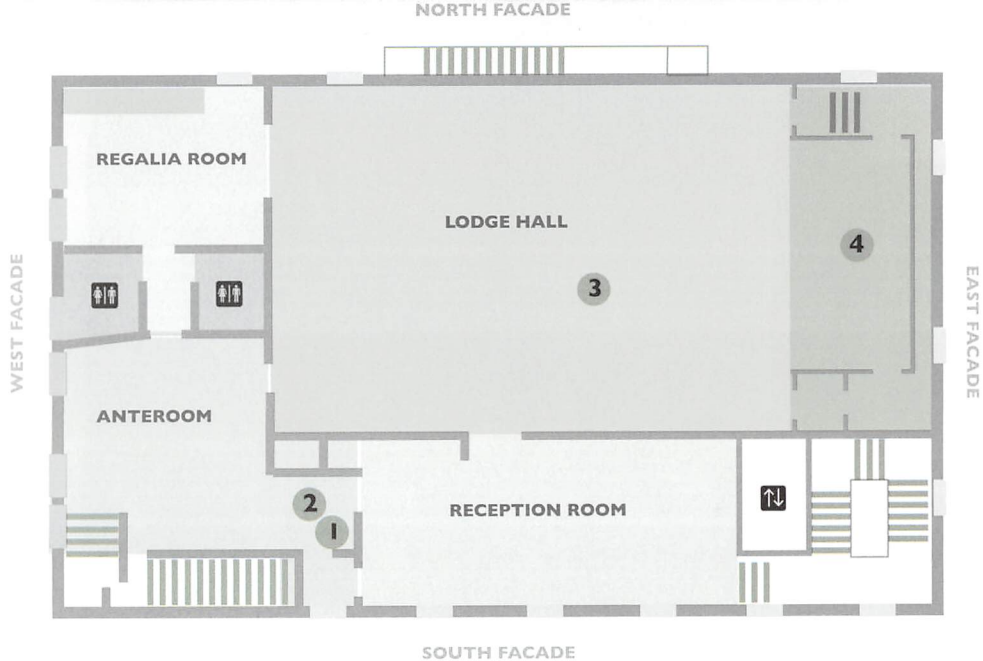




THIRD FLOOR

- 1 Wall stencil
- 2 Ceiling medallion and cornice
- 3 Ceiling
- 4 Stage

THIRD FLOOR



The third floor was used by the Masons, and like the Odd Fellow space on the second floor, exploring the way members would have moved between and within lodge rooms provides insight into the Masonic ritual. Historic circulation patterns may be easier to discern on this floor because of its continued use for public assembly. Members or initiates would arrive in the Anteroom, move into the Regalia Room, and then enter the lodge room for meetings and rituals. Rooms, circulation patterns, and architecture had meaning and affected the way spaces were used. Just as on the second floor, the architecture contains clues to those meanings.



Anteroom

Vignette: wall stencil

A portion of the original wall paint has been preserved at the top of the wall in the southeast corner. This decorative scheme was not the first interior wall treatment on the third floor, but it has been the most enduring; a historic photograph of the lodge hall verifies that it was in place before 1920. The walls in the Anteroom and Lodge Hall have been repainted to match this period. Note that the original scheme included a sponge-painted effect.

Vignette: Ceiling Medallion and Cornice

The center ceiling medallions and curved cornices that bridge the wall and ceiling have been cleaned and preserved. A thin layer of paint has been applied to deteriorated portions of the cream background and blue accent colors to lightly amplify the original effect. Note that the gold painted highlights have oxidized over the years; the once metallic shine now has an aged patina.





Regalia Room

New restrooms were required to serve the adjacent space. The Masons' Regalia Room—historically, much like the Odd Fellows' on the second floor—has been adapted to include this function. A modern prep kitchen was also added on the north wall to support gatherings and events.

Lodge Hall

Most of the ceilings on the third floor were originally covered in pressed metal. Although those in the west-facing rooms are still intact, a roof failure led to the eventual collapse of the lodge hall ceiling. (See photo on page 4.) The roof was repaired, but the pressed metal was not salvageable. The interior rehabilitation involved the installation of a new plaster ceiling and moldings arranged to recreate the proportions and configuration of the original geometric design.



Stage

Drama appears to have been the primary consideration when the Masons' lodge hall was modified to include a full theatrical stage, complete with an elevated platform, footlights, overhead stage rigging, backstage area, and decorative proscenium and backdrop. Unfortunately, the historic stage was situated directly under the failed roof and incurred significant damage before the building was acquired by the NPS. By then, the stage floor was buckled and rotted, the ceiling had collapsed, and mold had worked its way up the stage backdrop. The interior rehabilitation included a complete reconstruction of the stage platform and walls and incorporated a new stair and platform lift for stage access. The backdrop and proscenium that featured Classical and Babylonian designs has been recreated and printed on durable wall panels. Some elements, such as stage rigging and footlights, were not recreated, but the original components have been accessioned into the park's museum collection and saved as a record of the stage's early use.



Glossary

Arborvitae

Any of several North American or eastern Asian evergreen shrubs of the genus *Thuja*, having flattened branchlets with opposite scalelike leaves and small cones.

Cornice

The projecting uppermost portion of a wall, often treated in a decorative manner with brackets or other ornamentation.

Elevation

Refers to an architect's drawing of a façade.

Façade

One of the external faces of a building.

Faux painting

An ancient decorative painting technique designed to resemble something else, like wood or marble, and is also referred to as faux finishing. From the French *faux*, meaning false.

Fraternal group

Fraternal is from the Latin *frater*, meaning brother. A fraternal organization is one in which members associate for a mutually beneficial purpose, including social, professional, or honorary principles.

Masons

A fraternal organization with origins in Great Britain. It is organized into independent Grand lodges, each with its own subordinate (or constituent) lodges. The Free and Accepted Masons Lodge No. 271 met in the Union Building.

Historic paint analysis

The scientific analysis of historic paint and other finishes. Used to determine the paint used during a particular time period in a building's history.

Historic preservation

Work planned and designed to maintain the existing form, integrity, and materials of a historic property; focuses more on the maintenance and repair of historic features and materials rather than on replacing them.

Odd Fellows

A fraternal organization with origins in Great Britain, focusing on providing help to members in need. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows Lodge No. 90 met in the Union Building.

Rehabilitation

Work planned and designed to make possible a compatible use for a property through repair, alterations, and additions while preserving the features and qualities that convey its historic, cultural, or architectural values.

Restoration

An accurate depiction of the form, features, and character of a property as it appeared during a particular period in time. This may require the removal of features from other periods in its history and/or the reconstruction of missing features.

Universal design

Spaces, places, and objects designed to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible.

Vignette

An exhibit featuring original architectural finishes.

Historic Preservation Resources

National Trust for Historic Preservation
www.preservationnation.org/

Illustrated Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings
<http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/rhbl/>

Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes
http://www.nps.gov/hps/hli/landscape_guidelines/index.htm

Preservation Directory.com
<http://www.preservationdirectory.com/HistoricalPreservation/Home.aspx>

Formal Organizations that met in the Union Building

Free and Accepted Masons: 1889-ca.1970

Calumet Lodge, No. 271

Montrose Commandery, No. 38, Knights Templar

Calumet Lodge Order of the Eastern Star, No. 182

Independent Order of Odd Fellows: 1889-ca.1960

Hecla Lodge, No. 90

Modern Woodmen of America: 1895-ca.1918

Seneca Camp, No. 1247

Knights of Pythias: 1895-ca.1917

Charity Lodge, No. 131

Independent Order of Rechabites: 1895-ca.1910

Willing Worker's Tent, No. 20

Helping Hand Tent, No. 34

Busy Bee Tent, No. 10 (Juvenile)

Lincoln Tent, No. 935

Ancient Order of United Workmen: 1895-ca.1908

Red Jacket Lodge, No. 129

Ancient Order of Hiberians: 1895-ca.1904

A.O.H. Division, No. 2 Ladies Auxiliary

Ancient Order of Foresters of America: 1895-1902

Court Robin Hood, No. 6283

Sons of Hermann: 1895-1902

Calumet Lodge, No. 4

Improved Order of Redmen: 1895-96

Red Jacket Tribe, No. 42

Daughters of Rebekah: 1897-1904

Stella Lodge, No. 206

St. John Baptiste Society: 1895-1905

Suomi Society: 1895-96

Commercial Tenants

Jackson's Palace Store: 1889-90

Miss Mary Voitlin's Store: 1890-92

Sample Rooms (various owners): 1889-1905

United States Post Office: 1892-1904

Lake Superior Stone and Brick Company: 1906-13

Amerikan Untiset Newspaper: 1909-14

Merchants and Miners Bank: 1889-1906

Paivalehti Publishing Company: 1908-1913

People's Fuel Company: 1908-1913

Keweenaw Printing Company: 1917-ca 1980

Isaacson and Sodergren Millinery: 1906-07

Houghton County Electric Light Company: 1896-1906

