

Archives and Rare Book Rooms Environmental Renovation: Projects at Penfield Library

ABSTRACT

The special collections—the archives and rare book holdings—at the Penfield Library at SUNY Oswego provide an important historical and information resource for the university at this campus. As the most important part of the library collections, they need special preservation precautions, distinct from the balance of the library holdings. However, the building systems previously serving this area of the library had several shortcomings as a good conservation environment. These included problems with low humidity in winter, high humidity in summer, mold, threats from overhead piping, and a lack of effective particulate and gaseous filtration.

The archives and rare books rooms in the basement were previously served by a relatively new heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) system generally independent from the balance of the building. This system had several problems, the greatest of which was the reliance on campus steam for reheat. Since the steam is not available at the building in summer, no positive dehumidification was provided, leading to high humidities, puckering book leaves, and some mold. This was compounded by problems with the dedicated humidifier serving this area, inadequate filtration, the threats from overhead piping, and subsurface water seepage.

The library undertook a plan to improve the HVAC systems and to provide better protection of the collection from building systems risks. Among the several alternatives considered by the library, the option with the highest probability of success and very modest cost was to provide new, dedicated HVAC systems to serve the special collections areas. Unlike the original systems, the new systems were designed for dehumidification, using their own condenser heat for reheat, without relying on the campus

steam. The new systems also provide particulate and gaseous filtration, as well as effective humidification. To address the building piping problems in the existing archives room, the library decided to relocate the archives to the classroom across the hall, which had no such piping.

Although small, this project demonstrates a successful renovation for a special collections area, at a reasonable cost, using commercial HVAC equipment. This is a very typical situation for libraries where the main stacks may hold circulating materials, but where a small subset of the collections require a better preservation environment. Project costs and hygrothermographs for startup and long-term operations were presented.

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