

A Legacy in Stone

As a newly enrolled ancient civilizations and English major, Mike Brooks '85 met Graves Hall early and visited often.

Home at the time to the department of modern and classical languages, the building even hosted the first Hope class he ever attended back in the fall of 1981. "My first course as a freshman was 'The Golden Age of Greece' IDS [a 17-credit course]," he said.

Even then, he appreciated the unique building with its quarried stone exterior and round tower. "It's undoubtedly one of the most remarkable buildings on campus. It's distinctive," Brooks said.

He never imagined, however, that he would one day be back as part of the building's story himself, helping to preserve the historic 19th century structure so that it can continue to serve future generations of students. Since exterior work began in May, he has been part of the large team of craftsmen whose hard work and skill are giving the building new life, serving as an apprentice stone mason with Potts Masonry, one of the project's subcontractors.

Scheduled for completion in time for the start of classes next fall—a semester earlier than originally projected—Graves Hall is in the midst of a \$5.7-million adaptive restoration.

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– Mike Brooks '85



As a freshman in 1981, Mike Brooks '85 attended his first class at Hope in Graves Hall. Now he is part of the team of craftsmen who are restoring the historic building so that it can remain a vital part of the Hope campus for decades to come.

The project is returning the building to the character and elegance it enjoyed when dedicated in 1894 as the college's chapel and library, although with an emphasis on contemporary classroom needs and with the addition of an elevator that will open each of the building's three floors to those with mobility needs.

The stone work has included both repair to the original building, which was significantly worn by the elements after more than 110 years, and blending the addition into the original. Brooks and his colleagues have used a combination of original, locally quarried Waverly Stone; similar pieces from long-fallen Van Raalte Hall; and stone from Ohio that was chosen to match.

"It's fun being back. It's wonderful, working on the stone," Brooks said. "Doing a building this old is just a super opportunity if you like to do stone work, so I've really enjoyed this part of it."

Brooks came to Hope as a student after four years in the U.S. Marine Corps, during which he had become drawn to cross-cultural mission work. He thus graduated aiming for the mission field, and went on to complete a master's in linguistics at the University of Texas-Arlington and serve with the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Wycliffe Bible Translators.

He and his wife were overseas helping translate the Bible into non-written languages when they both became ill, prompting the

couple to return Stateside for medical care. The move also prompted Brooks to make a career change.

"It was hard to find work as an anthropological linguist in Western Michigan," he said. "But I felt that we needed to be here."

It's not where he set out to be, but he has enjoyed his work in masonry. He finds the creativity rewarding, and appreciates the good balance between the time he spends on his craft and the opportunity to be with his wife and their three adopted children. Crucially, he remains involved in teaching and ministry through his church—and, he notes, by example and opportunity in everyday life.

"I find that I have just as much ministry opportunity as a layman, maybe more, than I did as a professional minister and missionary," Brooks said.

"God has done some wonderfully miraculous things in my life," he said. "If we trust in *who* God is, it doesn't matter what path our journey takes us on," he said. "He's going to be leading us on a straight path all the way. He's always there, and he always makes our journey worthwhile."

"I can drive by here and can tell my kids I helped make this building what it is now, and that's a special thing, I think. That's a different kind of legacy," Brooks said. 🙌

(Editor's note: For more images of the Graves Hall project, please visit the college online.)

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