

Renovation at State Hospital reveals hidden treasure

Mashburn Construction has peeled back layers of history to reveal one of South Carolina's treasures.

The South Carolina State Hospital seems an unlikely spot for hidden treasure. But one of its buildings, a beautiful example of Greek revival architecture — designed by Robert Mills — is being restored after 150 years of use and neglect.

Born and reared in Charleston, Mills is best known outside the state for his design of the Washington Monument and the U.S. Treasury Building. While he was state architect, South Carolina authorized \$70,000 to construct a building to house the mentally ill. Mills not only designed the building but also supervised the construction.

In a lease-back arrangement with the state, Keenan Company purchased the land and the building. Mashburn is refurbishing the building for Keenan at a cost of \$5 million. Keenan will lease the structure to the state for 20 years, and this ownership will return to the state.

With this arrangement, the developer received the benefits of tax incentives for restoring an historic building and a guaranteed tenant for 20 years. The state receives a restored building, a lower-than-market rate for rental of the building, and ownership of the property in 20 years. The S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control will use the renovated structure.

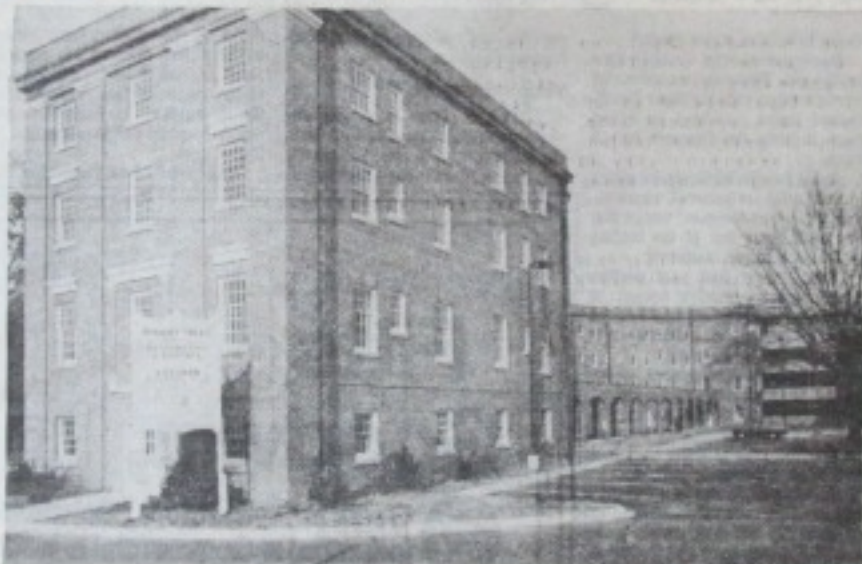


Photo by Doug Simons/The State

Work nears completion on Robert Mills-designed building at State Hospital

Blume, Cannon & Ott, architects for the restoration project, worked closely with the owner, the contractor, and the state to bring the building back to Mills' original design.

During restoration, work crews uncovered stone letters on the face of the building which read — ASYLUM.

The word, once sacred, is back today, but

Mills' building offered a model for care of the mentally ill at that time.

"Mills' idea was to build a fire-proof center," said Harry Mashburn, president of the construction firm. "He was far ahead of his time in the design. The building has simplistic beauty and shows Mills' sensitivity toward the needs of the patients."

Massive, four-foot diameter solid brick columns grace the main entrance. The center section of the building housed the director and his family, the staff, and provided meeting rooms and patient examining rooms.

Wings on each side of the center section housed 20 patients each — one

wing for male patients, the other for females. There were five individual rooms for patients on each of the four floors.

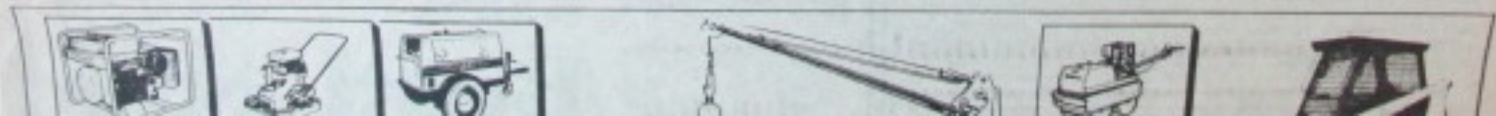
A stairway at the end of the wing opened onto an ornamental garden and courtyard where patients could exercise and enjoy the outdoors. The building had one of the nation's first roof gardens which patients could also use.

"Mills was strongly influenced by the Quakers' thoughts on caring for the mentally ill," said Phelps Ballman, a member of the Columbia Historical Society who advised the architect and contractor. "Individual rooms were ordered at that time. Mills put the patients' rooms on the south side of the building for sunlight and warmth. A large common room was on the north side of the vaulted hallway."

The state added four wing segments to house 20 patients each in 1838 and 1844, giving the building a semi-circular design around the courtyard, as Mills had envisioned. The building closed for patient care in 1938 and was remodeled and used as a dormitory for nurses.

"The building has not been used for the past 12 years," Mashburn said. "Our job was to remove all of the remodeling done in later years and restore the shell to its original condition. We also built a modern building at the end of one wing section to house the core of the mechanical

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Mills

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system for the entire structure including the mechanics of the heating, air conditioning, and ventilator systems."

During the restoration, Mashburn discovered a wood-fired furnace Mills designed to heat the building. Located in the basement, the furnace flues carried warm air through the walls to each floor. Records show Mills purchased the patent for the furnace from its Philadelphia inventor. The state will have the furnace area open for display to the public.

"At that time, heating a mental patient's room was revolutionary," Bellman said. "The patient could not be near an open flame, and there was no other way to keep them warm."

Mills also used his design to keep the patients comfortable in the summer. The building's copula has working windows which provided excellent ventilation.

"We opened the windows while we were working on the building last summer," said Lynn Shealy, Mashburn's project manager. "It was surprising how the airflow cooled the building. We also discovered a refrigeration hole in the courtyard. These were common in Columbia at that time."

Excavation around the building also discovered walls and a bricked stone drainage system.

The fireproofing extends from the brick floors to the soil mixed with broken pieces of brick and rock used as a fire retardant in the attic.

The spiral staircases in the center section, such as the ends of wings, were removed so that one could view the center staircase from the original iron-tinged, handrail. Stairs, steps, and hand-tipped metal railings form the staircases at the ends of the wings. A narrow, spiral metal staircase winds up to the copula.

"When we were refinishing the woodwork we were asked to leave the dents and scratches of time," Mashburn said. "That's difficult to do for a contractor. We want to make things look new. The architect did rubings on the wood, and we matched the color of the original stain."

Mashburn has restored other historic buildings in Columbia, but even an experienced contractor takes a big chance when reconditioning an old structure.

"You never know what you will find or what steps you might have to take to make a building structurally sound and follow the specifications of the owner and the architect," Mashburn said. "We did not have many problems with this building, and our estimator did a good job. We have suggested the brick be waterproofed, and I think this will probably be done. Decades of cleaning have removed the protective finish and made them permeable. Heavy rains can cause problems with the interior walls."

Although the building now has its original look and charm, the construction crews have hidden the piping for a modern heating and cooling system in Mills' brick flues and wiring runs through his casted ceilings and three-foot acid brick walls.

Mashburn and his subcontractors are putting on the finishing touches.

Subcontractors on the job are: Southeast Electric Company, Inc., electrical work; O.L. Hatley & Sons, air conditioning; Sox & Sons, grading and paving work; W.B. Gaimaris & Co., Inc., plumbing; and Holbrook Waterproofing Co., which repaired masonry surfaces such as brick and restored the window sills.

On the new building, subcontractors included Fritsch Construction Co., Inc., masonry; Columbus Glass, windows; and Smith & Shealy, structural steel.



Photo by Doug Givens/The State

The Mills-designed building is a classic example of Greek revival architecture

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