Building Transformation

The Penn Museum’s Building Renovations and New Galleries Project—comprising the complete renovation of the historic Harrison and Coxe (Egyptian) Wings, opened in 1915 and 1926, respectively, and the reinstallation of the iconic galleries housing collections from the ancient Near East, Egypt, and Asia—will transform our landmark building into a dynamic destination, with over 35,000 square feet of reinstalled gallery space. This project—and its exciting implications for the Museum—has been detailed in the pages of Expedition before, as we share these exciting changes with our most loyal supporters.

Now, the project is becoming a reality. In late 2015, Penn and the Museum were pleased to engage Gluckman Tang Architects (New York City), to lead the team designing the Coxe and Harrison Wing Renovation component, and Haley Sharpe Design (Leicester, England), with interpretive planners Tim Gardom Associates (London, England), to work with the curatorial team for the Galleries of the Ancient Middle East on design and narrative development. Expedition Circle and Loren Eiseley Society members had an opportunity to see a preview of the design and a virtual tour of the object groups selected for those galleries at a special event in June 2016.

The following month, HSC Building & Construction Managers (Exton, PA) was selected to review schematic designs and advise on and oversee construction for the Coxe and Harrison Wing Renovation Project. We are pleased to now share the scope and timeline for this project, which is designed in three phases, the first to commence later this year with demolition beginning in November, and to conclude by spring 2019.

The Inaugural Phase Will Include:

• A complete renovation of the historic Harrison Auditorium and its adjoining lobby area and restrooms, which will be rendered level and fully ADA accessible;

• Additional ADA and visitor comfort improvements in the Harrison Wing including a new passenger elevator to all levels, and water fountains;

• The reopening of the original 1899 staircase inside the Main Kamin Entrance to the first floor level, providing access to the Harrison Auditorium (this new access route will also connect the CAAM and Conservation Labs directly to the Auditorium on the first floor level for the first time);

• The concurrent removal of the 1915 staircase dividing the Main Kamin Entrance area from the current Museum Shop, allowing the creation of a large new gallery;
• The transformation of the pathway from the Main Kamin Entrance to the Egyptian Galleries, which will be widened by several feet, installed with floor-to-ceiling windows on the courtyard side, and—for universal accessibility—leveled and directed to a new elevator to all Coxe (Egyptian) Wing floors;

• New restrooms on both gallery floors of the Coxe Wing.

Because of the scope of the accessibility upgrades, we have shifted the opening of our new Galleries of the Ancient Middle East to April 2018 (from a previously reported date of fall 2017) as the timeline and location of demolition work in the Harrison Wing brings a risk of vibration and possible danger to the objects in proximity. With the same collections stewardship concerns, the Amarna: Egypt’s Place in the Sun and The Egyptian Mummy: Secrets and Science exhibitions will be de-installed in summer 2017 before the onset of demolition, and objects along the walls of both Egyptian Galleries closest to the Inaugural Phase construction zone will be secured in place behind a protective construction wall surrounding the entire scope of work. So, in fact, the Galleries of the Ancient Middle East will open alongside a construction wall: we hope members and visitors attending the opening events will pardon our appearance, and share our excitement at the new entrance experience taking shape behind it.

Phase Two (pending funding) will proceed directly following Phase One and complete the renovation of the Coxe Wing, including the reinstallation of its Egyptian Galleries with the palace of the Pharaoh Merenptah at full height in the upper floor, alongside two new side galleries showcasing our significant collections from ancient Nubia (in modern-day southern Egypt and Sudan). This phase will also include new, fully climate-controlled storeroms for the Egyptian Collection. Phase Three will complete the renovation of Pepper Hall and the Museum’s iconic Rotunda, as well as the installation of new galleries of Buddhism and the History of China.

We continue to work in close coordination with the leadership of Penn Medicine as the construction of their New Patient Pavilion goes forward immediately to our south. This construction project will create a major new landscaped walkway between the Museum and the New Patient Pavilion. Collaboration with the design team of the New Patient Pavilion has established the possibility of a new garden and event space at the Harrison Auditorium entrance, as envisioned in the preliminary rendering above left.

The largest building renovation in our history, the Building Transformation project will improve the accessibility of our historic galleries, while the reinstallation of touchstone galleries will provide new interpretations of many of our remarkable collections—a key feature in a Museum that is constantly exploring new stories and dimensions about the past. We thank you, our members, for your continued loyal support as we commence a multi-year construction period, and we look forward to keeping you updated on our progress through these pages in the months and years to come, and offering you a first glimpse of the exciting new galleries and renovated areas as they come online.