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Photo caption: Technology Hall is a “heavy, dense, solid building,” said Schilke. In this photo from the west, the floor repair lay below and to the right of the top right window.

Technology Hall benefits from construction over spring break

BILLINGS, March 10, 2014 – Spring break provided the perfect opportunity to renovate a sagging floor in Technology Hall on the Rocky Mountain College campus.

Built from 1908 into the 1930s mostly by Billings Polytechnic Institute student work study labor, Technology Hall was originally a steam plant and has been variously named the Machinery, Manual Arts, or Engineering Building. In 105 years, Technology Hall housed experiential education courses in farm implement repair, small motor construction, aircraft repair, welding and auto repair, bookbinding, photography, radio laboratory work, and electrical engineering. The last four grew into art and computer science programs that share the building today.

A professor teaching in Room 24 noted a sag in a corner of that room’s floor in the week before spring break. Professional engineer Jim Schilke of Structural Engineering Design in Billings assessed the injury February 27 and 28, while classes met elsewhere. To take advantage of spring break, RMC Director of Facilities Terry Steiner coordinated immediate repairs by a team from Dick Anderson Construction (DAC, formerly High Tech Construction). Repair required installation of new 2x10 floor joists and stone-affixed ledger for the floor under room 24. “This building structurally has been tested pretty well,” said Schilke. “It’s highly unlikely that it would happen again.”

The anonymous original architect of the building’s second floor addition put a wall (between Room 24 and the Jakab Frame Studio) above open space below. Although not meant to be load-bearing, this wall had cracked some of the second floor joists. As possible contributors to the droop, Schilke suggested the chance of an ice dam on the roof valley above or the storage many years ago of pails of geology rock samples along the wall. “The roof kicked in and kept it from sagging further,” he said. “Classroom loads even back then were designed for 40 lbs/ft² and storage loads up to 250 lbs/ft²,” he said. The 2014 repair refreshes Room 24 to hold the heaviest storage loads.

The RMC Facilities Department maintains meticulous records of improvements to historic campus buildings, whether in energy efficiency, repurposing, structural maintenance, or historic renovation. Technology Hall has received all four. “It’s more fun to work on these beautiful old buildings,” said Brian Galbraith, project superintendent for DAC.

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