

The Salt Lake Tribune, Sunday, June 9, 1991 E7

Cityview: Old South High houses community college in style

History's first reference to the difficulties involved in putting new wines into old bottles appears to be in the New Testament, specifically Matthew 23:7. Currently, the most recent local contemporary testifying to problems involved in fitting the new into the old, putting square pegs in round holes — or utilizing an elderly building for new purposes — may well be Wallace Cooper. Mr. Cooper is a principal member of Cooper & Roberts, the architectural firm blessed with the task of converting the vacant South High building to the uses of the expanding Salt Lake Community College.



Jack Goodman

"That 60-year-old high-school building was remodeled many, many times — and we could find no records of most of the remodeling jobs," Mr. Cooper states somewhat sadly. "Tear down one partition and we find another behind it, with another back of that one. There were some 200 remodelings before we came on the scene — and there was not an accurate drawing for most of them."

The original South High plans were prepared by architect Carl W. Scott and his colleagues back in 1929 — and the original three-story, buff brick, art-deco-influenced structure was completed a bit over two years later. C. Walter Scott, son of the original architect and senior partner in today's firm of Scott, Louie & Browning, chuckles wryly at the fact the sizable high school was built at a cost of 22 cents per cubic foot. For the past many months, Wallace Cooper and his as-

sociates have been dealing with a structure of some 350,000 square feet. With its swimming pool and newly rehabilitated 1,700-seat auditorium, the structure just converted for Salt Lake Community College could very well be the largest single education building in town.

Outwardly, the lone addition the Cooper/Roberts team has blue-printed is the handsome new east entrance to the Grand Theatre, where "Camelot" starring Robert Peterson and directed by Pat Davis has been enjoying its local "first run." As you might gather from the adjacent sketch, the rather-inviting entry has been given, stylistically, a contemporary approach that fits its purpose and does not detract unduly from the simple 1929 style of the elderly school building.

An ample paved parking area east of the theater entrance and the adjoining swimming pool extends nearly to the Whittier School at 3rd East and 17th South streets. Between the college Grand Theatre and the parking spaces, crews have been planting trees, installing lighting standards, and completing a sizable fountain. The latter adjoins an abstract, sculptured affair of concrete that, when approached in an

unfurnished state a week or two ago, had beveled edges, hollow squares and a rather intriguing look.

South High School closed at the completion of the 1987-88 academic year, while the new community college facility opened for its first classes this mid-March. As one sad sign of the times, workers have chiseled away the South High School name panel above the building's State Street entrance. But chances are class after class will attend future annual reunions in the remodeled building, despite the name erasure, and will be recalling principals such as Laver Sorenson and Ralph Backman, such assistants as Nancy McCormick, and countless unused departed faculty members and classmates.

Meantime, some 450 students are already wandering the newly carpeted corridors of the college, occupying the green plaid seats of the "rehabbed" theater and filtering into completely new-appearing classrooms. They have been able to watch artisans doing their craftsmanlike jobs, informally illustrating the methodology of classroom work. Of special interest, teams of painters on high and low scaffolds have just about finished the job of adding new color to old panels, enlivening the State Street entrance lobby as well as the new theater's entryway. Master plasterer Gordon Storrs, at work in the auditorium, has been drawing an audience that has included Skill Center director Paul Salazar (a South High graduate) and staff members Edith Mitke and Jay Williams, as well as groups



Designed in 1929, building at 1575 S. State features a new "Grand Theatre" entrance.

Contractors estimate some 200 alterations before the current renovation took place.

of students absorbing the basics of new skills by watching artisans at work.

Perhaps the handsomest room in the refurbished building is its multiwindowed library, with its gracefully curved walls and quiet carpeted floor. Bookshelves (but no books) had been installed when I wandered through the one-time high school where some 200 rooms will soon be in use. Walt Scott — who is something of a "dean" of present-day architects — found me a press clipping from a 1931 journal reporting the building his father had designed had cost just \$850,000 plus another \$150,000 for a block-long slice of real estate when South High was built. "The gymnasium will seat 2,000, there's an 800-seat cafeteria, maple floors, ramps in-

stead of stairs," the article said. Obviously the old bottle into which today's architects and builders have been pouring their new

vintage wine was sturdily crafted stuff. The Salt Lake Community College's new-old building should be good for another half-century.

