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Construction with care at nation's oldest continuous museum - Jay Connolly

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Jay Connolly

Construction work on historic properties is a great responsibility. With five generations of our family business having worked on several historic buildings since our founding in 1880, it is also one that our family business does not take lightly. Most recently, our work in this arena included exterior and interior renovation at the oldest continually operating museum in the U.S., the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Mass. The PEM enlisted Connolly Brothers and Schwartz/Silver Architects for work on its Plummer Hall.

Built in 1857 for the Salem Athenaeum, the Essex Institute connected Plummer Hall and the Daland House (built in 1851 for Salem merchant John Tucker Daland) in 1907. The conjoined structure makes up part of the Essex Institute Historic District, which in 1972 was listed as a Massachusetts Historic Landmark and as a U.S. historic district in the National Register of Historic Places.

While the principles of sound construction do not change from one project to another, any renovation project in designated historic settings requires an attention to detail that goes beyond painstaking. When working with materials such as old brick, ornate stone, copper, and slate roofing on an active museum, leadership and personnel matters. It is imperative to ensure that everyone – from myself to all tradesmen involved in the project – is mindful of the gravity of being entrusted to work on a part of our shared American history.

As PEM director of facilities and security Robert Monk notes, “Institutions like ours have to approach construction projects differently than most commercial operations.”

Fortunately, our team understood that such work is more than “just another construction job.” It is my understanding that this acknowledgement is why this renowned and historic museum, home to some of America’s earliest artifacts, has called on the Connolly family for behind-the-scenes work for four generations now, extending back prior to World War II. We are proud to continue playing a supporting role for an institution that is a cultural staple in our region and in our nation’s history. In addition to being a great responsibility to work on such historic structures, it is also a great honor.

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