Our purpose is to inspire a broader understanding and appreciation of the diversity and cultural heritage of our region by placing it within a global context. As an educational and research component of the Department of Anthropology, the central mission of the Museum is to train and actively involve University students in the activities of preservation, research, interpretation, and exhibition of material culture for the benefit and enrichment of the local community. The Museum's educational mission is grounded in the scholarship that is based on its collections and the stewardship of those collections.

Within Old Main, our Museum houses numerous collections excavated throughout Detroit by Wayne State archaeologists. Today, Wayne State students and faculty continue excavations and add to our growing collections and understanding of the region and its relationship to the broader history.

Below is a list of some of our site specific collections situated throughout Detroit.

- Belle Isle
- Roosevelt Park
- Fort Wayne
- Fort Lernoult
- Fort Wayne
- People Mover
- Hart Plaza
- Summer Island
- Tyra Site
- Walker Tavern
- Corktown
- Trowbridge House
- Pine Grove
1994 - Restoration of Old Main began in the fall for two reasons. One was to commemorate the centennial of Old Main's construction. Also, routine maintenance was put off during the lean times of the 1980s, and this took its toll on the aging structure. The building would be closed for two years.

Ghafari Associates Inc. handled the restoration; its owner, former U.S. ambassador to Slovenia Yousif Ghafari, is a WSU alumnus.

This restoration had some good points: The 100-year-old electrical and mechanical systems were updated; new windows and air-conditioning were installed; and a new wing, the Elaine Jacob Gallery, was added to the back of the building at Hancock and Second.

This addition houses a planetarium, recital space and art galleries. However, the work on the interior was fairly heavy-handed, and the inside of Old Main lost some of its charm. The project was completed in 1997.

Interestingly, during the restoration, Old Main was power-washed, finally revealing the original color of the bricks, which hadn't been cleaned in years. But the move also cost the building the ivy that covered its exterior.

Today, Old Main houses the Gordon L. Grosscup Museum of Anthropology, a Geology Museum, the university's planetarium, and dance studios, as well as general classroom space.

For a campus that has demolished old structures in order to expand, Old Main is an important tie to the past - and has been where generations of Detroiter began their future careers.
1956 - Wayne became a state funded institution and furthered their outward expansion. And became named Wayne State University.

1958 - Old Main received a state historical marker, and it became an official historical site. This also became a transition point as the once focal point of the university became more of a symbol than a hub of activity.

1960 - Old Main again housed only classrooms, as administrative offices - such as the cashier, records and the registrar - were moved out.

1961 - Old Main had elevators installed.

1964 - “At Wayne, Only Old Main Remains the Same” reads a 1964 Detroit News article about the number of new building projects on campus.


1973 - A memo was sent from WSU administrator David Layne to WSU President George Gullen in September talking about “the administration’s commitment to demolish all of Old Main when replacement facilities were available.” Despite its historical status it did not avoid being targeted for demolition.

1975 - In response to Wayne State’s plan to demolish the David Mackenzie house, a student group called Preservation Wayne organized and successfully halted the demolition of the house, as well as a number of other buildings on campus. The board’s reason for wanting to knock down Mackenzie’s old abode? To build a sewer line to the university’s new apartment building, the Forest Apartments.
1925 - City College held its first commencement for 62 students in Central’s auditorium. The graduation ceremony represented not just students getting their diplomas, but seven years of hard work to make the school into a college.

Detroit opened its main branch of the Detroit Public Library on the northeast corner of Cass and Putnam.

1926 - Central High moved to Tuxedo and Linwood, just north of Chicago Boulevard. And the old building on Cass and Warren was renamed the Main Building.

1923 - The Legislature passed the Smith-Burns Bill, after the board of education prepared a college bill and lobbied for the school, which gave the school the authority to grant degrees.

1933 - The Board of Education combined its six individual colleges — liberal arts, education, pharmacy, engineering, medicine and a graduate school — into one university to avoid the city’s financial cuts.

1934 - The name Wayne University was officially adopted. That name is still chiseled over the building’s arched doorways.

1950 - The Main Building was rechristened simply Old Main.

1952 - When a new aluminum roof was put on the director of grounds in 1952, Alfred C. Lamb, thought the building had at least 200 years of life left.

1950s - With increased funding after the war ended, the university began constructing its own buildings and the individual colleges were moved out of Old Main. Engineering, pharmacy, nursing and education students got their own spaces.

State Funding and Christening Old Main

1937 - An addition to add classroom space closed off the grass courtyard along Warren.

1950 - The Main Building was rechristened simply Old Main.
1893- Detroit’s man secondary school Capital High School in Capitol Park burned down in January.

1894- Board of Education proposed site for new school at Brush and Alexandrine, but it was vetoed by Mayor Hazen S Pingree due location being too close to hospitals and “contagious diseases.”

1895- The board then moved the building materials to a new site, at Cass and Warren. This is why Old Main’s Cornerstone is dated 1894, although it wasn’t laid until May 13, 1895.

1896- Central High opened, quickly gaining a reputation for being Detroit’s best high school. It was guided by Principal David Mackenzie.

1908- As the number of students grew, a large wing was added to the rear of the building.

1913- Dr. Burt R. Shurly asked Mackenzie to establish a one-year premedical course at Central High. Mackenzie gladly supported the idea, and Detroit Board of Education officials worked to set up a junior college. That fall, 25 graduates of Central High and other high schools enrolled in the course.

1917- The college was authorized by the state Legislature, which extended the course to two years. That fall, Mackenzie issued the first list of classes for his school, which was called the Detroit Junior College. In the second semester a student council formed and adopted the school colors: old gold and Kelly green. Green and gold are still Wayne State’s colors today.

1921- The inevitable happened: The growing college and the high school began to struggle with space. The school, which had a capacity of 1,800 students, housed 3,000. However, the Board of Education was interested in the idea of creating a community college, and the high school’s days were numbered.
William George Malcomson (pictured left) was born in 1856 in Hamilton, Ontario. He began his architectural career early, and in 1875 supervised the construction of the Henry Langley designed Erie Street United Church in Ridgetown, Ontario. In 1882, Malcomson married Jessie E. McKinlay; the couple had five children. Malcomson died in 1937.

William E. Higginbotham (pictured right) was born in 1858 in Detroit. He was educated in the Detroit public schools, and at the age of 19 joined the architectural form of J. V. Smith. He married Nettie M. Morphy in 1892; the couple had two children: a daughter, Doris and a son Bruce. Higginbotham died in 1922.

The firm was retained by the Detroit Board of Education in 1895, and between 1895 and 1923 had designed over 75% of the school buildings in Detroit. They also designed many other notable structures here in Detroit.
David L. Mackenzie was a noteworthy Michigan educator and administrator. He was born in Detroit on May 28, 1860, and attended Capitol High School and the University of Michigan. While at the University of Michigan, he earned his Master's degree in teaching (1881).

Mackenzie returned to Detroit to run the newly built Central High School in 1896. This school is the location of what is now Old Main.

By 1913, under Mackenzie's direction, a one-year, college-level premedical curriculum was established at Central High - the first junior college curriculum organized in Michigan.

In 1919, David Mackenzie - then Principal of Detroit Central High School and Detroit Junior College - was officially appointed first Dean of the college that he had helped found. With Mackenzie at the helm, Detroit Junior College became the third largest institution of higher learning in Michigan. Mackenzie served as the head of Detroit Junior College and first dean of the College of the City of Detroit.

David L. Mackenzie continued as Dean until his death in 1926.

In 1928, the Board of Education dedicated its newest high school in memory of Mackenzie. Located at 9275 Wyoming Street, the school closed its doors for the last time in June 2007 and was later demolished in 2012.

For his own home, David Mackenzie also turned to Malcomson and Higginbotham. It is located just south of Old Main on Cass Ave.

It is appropriate that an institution of advanced education that David Mackenzie helped to create now owns this mansion.