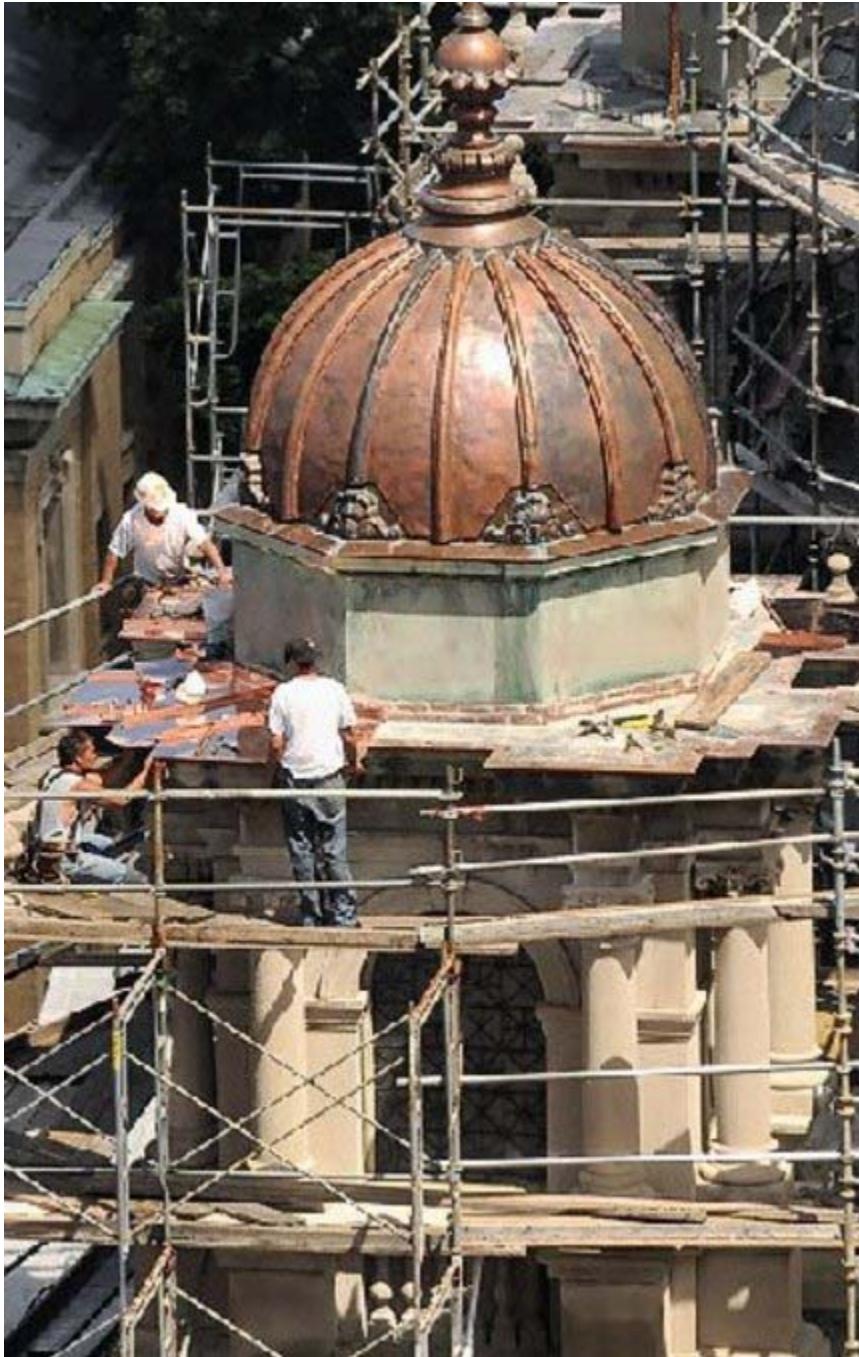


# Columbus Circle buildings will soon be bathed in light

By [Dick Case](#)

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Dennis Nett/The Post-Standard, file photo, 2008

The Onondaga County courthouse and other buildings around Columbus Circle in Syracuse will all be lit up when a \$400,000 county project later this year. Last year, workers stand on scaffolds at the top of the courthouse, working on putting on new copper roof of one of four domes that surround the main dome. I owe Lucy Borel one. She turned me on to lights bathing the county courthouse and its neighborhood.

Lucy called last week: she'd read about the project to refurbish the 100-year-old courthouse, which is her neighbor. Lucy lives in Jefferson Towers, in Presidential Plaza. Her apartment looks down on the structure, which was built in 1907.

What about the lights? Lucy wanted to know.

I knew the call to make. I phoned up Manny Barbas, who is deputy facilities commissioner for Onondaga County. In April 2007, Manny and Rex Giardine, director of construction, toured photographer David Lassman and me around the landmark. The two-year redo had just started. Now, with landscaping about done, it's finished.

Lucy is right, Manny explained. She's talking about the Downtown Lighting Project.

Wait a minute, I say. Haven't we been hearing about this for years? Back to 2000?

Yes, but it's finally good to go. The legislature approved spending close to \$400,000 on the job and a contract was awarded last week to Patricia Electric of Syracuse. The job's to be done by September 2010.

"We will be lighting all of the buildings around Columbus Circle, including the courthouse, the Carnegie Building (the former library), the Mizpah and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception," Manny explained. Also, the Civic Center and Community Plaza will be included, as well.

"This will definitely improve the aesthetics and security of downtown," according to Manny.

Spotlights will be placed on buildings, including the Civic Center or on adapted street poles, he says. The money to pay for all this comes from room and tobacco taxes.

Manny said the project was inspired by the work lighting designer Howard Brandston did in 2007 for the Niagara Mohawk-National Grid building on Erie Boulevard West. Brandston relit the Statue of Liberty among another projects. He's retired but Manny said he stayed on as a consultant to the county project.

Lucy had a particular question about the courthouse dome. Is it getting new lighting? (The dome was cleaned in the renovation and now shines like a new penny.)

The answer is yes, according to Manny, both inside and outside.

Interior lighting will shine through the dome's art glass windows. Also, during restoration, contractors found the original fixture in the cupolas' filial, Manny explains. It likely was part of architect Archimedes Russell's (and partner Melvin King's) original design. The fixture will be relit as part of the new project.

The courthouse-lighting project will be Manny Barbas's last on the county watch. He's planning to retire at the end of the month after 36 years on the job. He's not gone from the scene, however. Manny says he'll be back as a private contractor, working on a "major downtown project" in the new year. We'll find out what that is soon enough, he says.

### **The May connection**

The Rev. Samuel J. May, anti-slavery Syracuse pastor and head of the May Memorial Church, is connected to Louisa May Alcott, author of "Little Women." He was her uncle. Louisa's mother, Abigail, was May's sister.

Dennis Connor, curator of history at Onondaga Historical Association, reinforces that tie in a lobby exhibit he did for the current musical production of "Little Women" at Syracuse Stage. Dennis says Uncle Samuel loaned the Alcotts money and found jobs for two of Louisa's sisters at the state Idiot Asylum (Developmental Center) in Syracuse. In 1875, after "Little Women" was published, Alcott was mobbed by young girls, clamoring for her autograph, while attending a women's rights convention in Syracuse.

Dick Case writes Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Reach him at 470-2254, or by e-mail, [dcase@syracuse.com](mailto:dcase@syracuse.com).