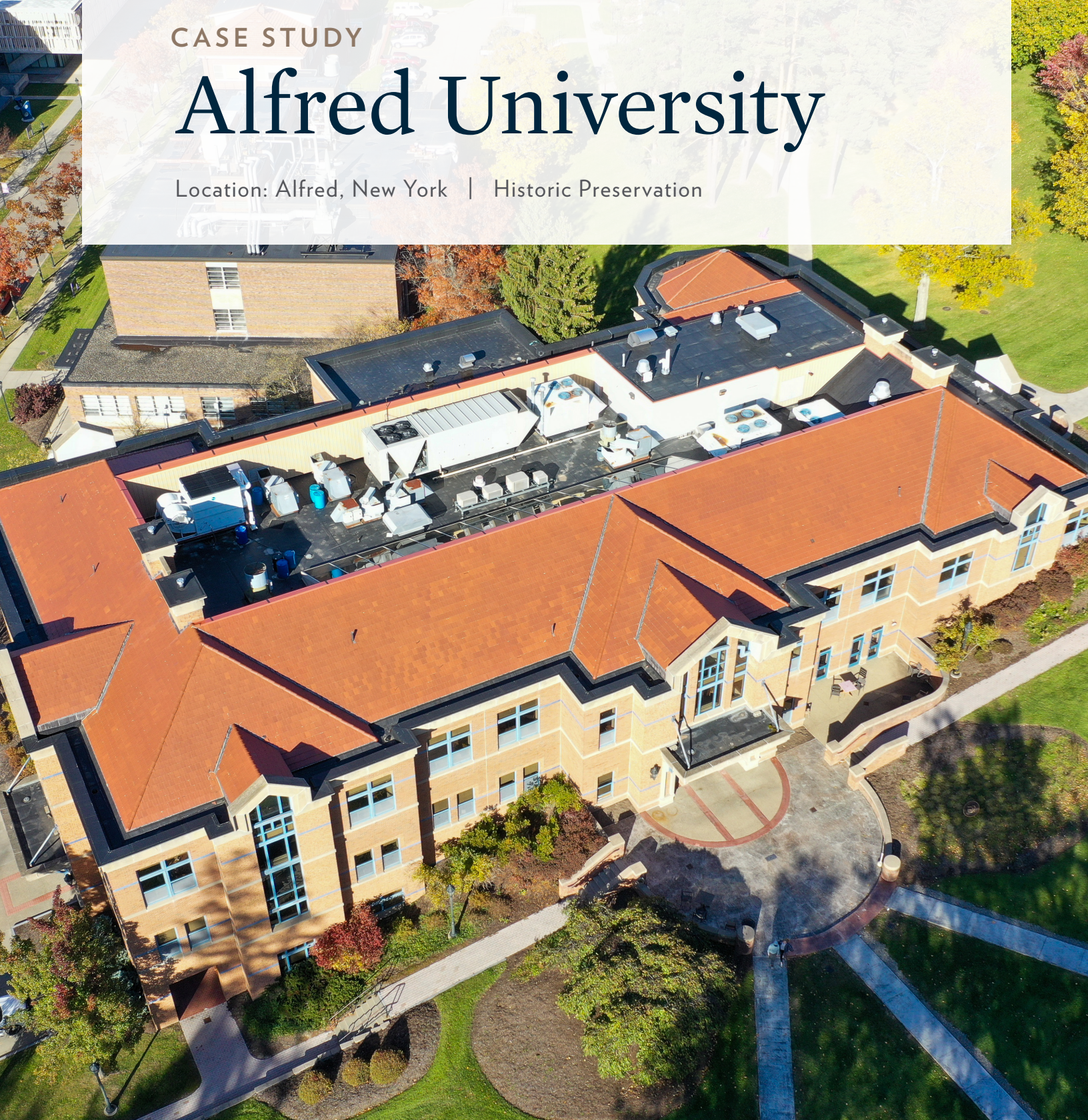




CASE STUDY

# Alfred University

Location: Alfred, New York | Historic Preservation



## Alfred University: A History of Terra Cotta

In the late 1880s, Alfred, New York, discovered their city was geographically positioned on riverbeds containing high-quality clay, the kind that could be used to produce durable terra cotta products. By 1889, a small group of local Alfred entrepreneurs founded the Celadon Terra Cotta Company with the intent to capitalize on this new clay finding to manufacture terra cotta items such as bricks, roof tiles, and even decorative ornamental tiles for building exteriors.

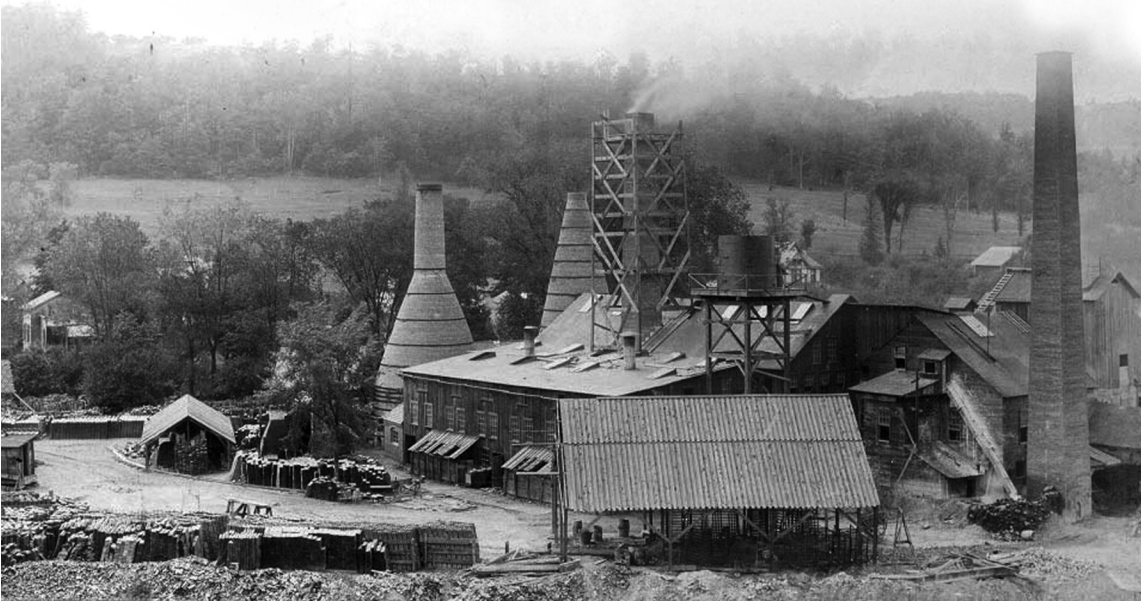
The Celadon Terra Cotta Company soon prospered and expanded. In 1892, the “Terra Cotta” building was established as a combination office and product display center. Several examples of their distinctive tiles were set into the exterior walls so prospective customers could view and admire what was available for purchase. Because of its unusual nature, the now historic Terra Cotta building has the honor of being registered as an official landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Sites. At the time, a replica of the building was produced and exhibited at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, landing Celadon closer to Ludowici territory.

The booming new terra cotta manufacturer wowed the 1893 World’s Fair enough to catch the eye of the Ludowici Roofing Tile Company, which was also known for their high-quality terra cotta manufacturing in Chicago. Ludowici took an interest in Celadon as they had a heavily Germanic and Northern European workforce trained in working with clay able to withstand brutally cold winters, and who were regarded as experts in making beautiful and lasting tiles. In 1906, the Ludowici Roofing Tile Company purchased the Celadon Terra Cotta Company, forming Ludowici-Celadon.

Located near the Celadon manufacturing grounds, Alfred University capitalized on this new clay potential and became a birthplace for American ceramics by founding one of the most esteemed ceramic engineering programs in the United States. Over time, the manufacturing facility expanded until it occupied the space where, today, Alfred University’s McLane Physical Education Center and the football field preside. In 1909, the manufacturing plant was destroyed by fire, all except for the Terra Cotta building, which stood apart, on North Main Street. The value of the Terra Cotta building lies not only in its relationship to local ceramics, but also as a reflection of Victorian thought and tastes, a unique artifact of our past. To Alfred University, this historic building is a key reminder of the legacy of the Celadon Terra Cotta Company.

Today, Ludowici’s connection with Alfred remains intact as several team members are graduates of Alfred University’s ceramic engineering program.





Photography: Courtesy of Laurie Meehan, Alfred University

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