

Postwar Plans for a University Library Building

This paper stimulated much interest at the thirty-first Conference of Eastern College Librarians held at Columbia University on November 25, 1944.

IN VIEW of the general topic to which this whole conference is devoted, I suppose that I ought to begin by indicating how the situation for which we shall have to provide after the war will differ from that with which we had to deal before the war. But in spite of all that has been thought and written and spoken about the world into which we are emerging, it is still to me a tough and a dark subject which has to be dealt with mainly in terms of faith and hope. Theoretically, it seems to me that we ought to expect that the world will be impoverished, that we are confronted with a great and tragic depletion of resources and material, intellectual and spiritual. And yet I cannot bring myself to face the stark realities of such a situation and I feel myself surrounded and supported by a great body of opinion which is unwilling to face it. Moreover, I am very conscious of the role which vision and faith play in the building of great universities and great libraries and other institutions which man cannot do without. And so I have come to the conviction that in planning for the future I must act on the assumption that in some way the resources will be found to make the university which I serve a greater university than it has ever been before, and that it must be provided

with a far greater library than it has ever had before. I hold that this assumption must be sound because the situation in which we find ourselves, the demand for educational service with which we are confronted, require that it shall be sound. And translating this assumption, or a part of this assumption, into material terms, the obvious and unavoidable fact is that we must have at the University of Pennsylvania, in the fairly near future, a great new university library building.

But if you grant my primary assumption, I still feel some embarrassment in coming before you, for two reasons. First, the inevitable obstacles and delays one encounters in the promotion and planning of so large an undertaking as a university library are so great that it seems impossible to go forward upon a predetermined schedule, and so I have to confess that we are not as far along at this date as I had expected to be, or as I think we ought to be, before I render this report. Second, I have some apprehension lest you may be expecting from me a very radical new approach to the problem of library planning—an approach such as you might have had from certain of my professional colleagues whom I shall leave unnamed. But I must ask you to bear in mind that a great library is a community enterprise which, if it is really to fulfil its purpose, must satisfy the desires and reflect the temper of its clientele. And surely I do not need to remind you that Philadelphia is a city somewhat hoary with age and

steeped in tradition and that the University of Pennsylvania is a moderately conservative institution. You will not, therefore, expect me to unfold before you plans for a great new library in which the stacks have almost wholly disappeared, or in which the stacks are placed entirely underground and the rest of the library is built on top of them, or in which there is to be no reference department in any usually accepted sense of the term, or in which provision is to be made for most of the instruction in the humanities and social sciences to be carried on inside the library. No, the community which I serve is not prepared for such novelties, and the plans over which I have been laboring conform more nearly to the conventional type, though I trust that they have not been dictated by really blind conservatism.

Problems

It must, it seems to me, be fundamental in the planning of any university library that one begins by taking account of certain facts and fixed conditions which, since they are unalterable, must be permanently reckoned with. With some of these you are, of course, perfectly familiar. The most conspicuous example that occurs to me is the condition that is all but universal in American universities, viz., that we are expected to combine in one plant a college library for the service of undergraduates and a great research library for the service of graduate teaching and advanced study. But apart from such common problems as this, we have at the University of Pennsylvania certain others which arise from our peculiar situation. We are a city university located in an area that is dirty and noisy and somewhat congested. We serve a clientele not all of whom can be dealt with in terms of trust: the problem of the loss of books through theft is for us a serious

one. On the other hand, the public demands from outside the university which are made upon us for library accommodation, or which are likely to be made upon us, are not very burdensome, as they appear to be in some other cities, and we are committed to a policy of public service which it is a pleasure to render and which we feel it to be our duty to render so long as we are able to do so without serious inconvenience to our more immediate clientele. Philadelphia is a community in which inter-library cooperation has already gone far and in which we believe it is destined to go farther. The university believes strongly in this cooperative movement and desires to take a leading part in it. To quote from a report which was published in 1942: "The University of Pennsylvania Library . . . accepts . . . a responsibility for service to the community at large and to the student world at large. It opens its doors and extends its facilities liberally to all those seeking knowledge out of books."

We have, therefore, in all seriousness, to plan a library which shall be not only for the service of the University of Pennsylvania in all its departments but also for the service of neighboring institutions of learning and of research laboratories attached to industrial corporations and also for the service of individual scholars unconnected with the university.

Building Plans

I now turn to speak more definitely of our building plans as they stand at this moment.

The site chosen for our proposed new library—which will be the initial structure in a proposed new quadrangle lying between 34th and 36th Sts. and between Spruce and Walnut—is the ground along the west side of 34th St. from Irvine Audi-

torium northward to Woodland Ave. There is room for a building about 175 by 390 feet, and plans already approved for the regrading of the campus will give us a ground level at the main entrance on the west front approximately one full story above the ground level on the 34th St. side where, presumably, the service entrance will be located. On one end of this site the present university library stands, within which there are two special structures housing the H. C. Lea Memorial Library and the Furness Memorial Library. It was our first thought that we must endeavor to incorporate at least some part of our old structure in the new and that, in any case, we must manage to keep the old library in operation in its present building until enough of the new structure had been erected to enable us to move in and begin operations there. But it soon appeared that such a plan would almost certainly lead us into some very serious and, in the long run, costly mistakes. Therefore, we have now decided that we ought to begin by planning the very best library which we are capable of planning upon the ground which is at our disposal, without taking any account of the existing building. After that we shall consider whether any use can be made of the existing building, either as an operating unit while the new building is under construction or as a permanent part of the new structure. In short, while we have every desire to avoid waste and the great inconvenience of two movings, we are determined not to let these considerations stand in the way of the best permanent solution of our problems which our situation will permit.

As I have already indicated, one of our serious problems is the loss of books through theft, and we have been forced to the conclusions that, whatever the inconveniences of such an arrangement, our new library

should have only one public exit and that this exit must be rigorously controlled through guards and turnstiles and the inspection of brief cases and luggage. But having made the building as safe as we can at the exit, I am in favor of the greatest possible liberality and freedom of movement inside. There will, presumably, have to be some limitation upon stack entrance for lower undergraduate classmen. But I am far from being in sympathy with the policy which has prevailed in some of our research libraries of excluding from the stacks all but a very privileged few. It is my belief that working space in individual carrells in the stacks costs less than seating space in a general reading room and that it is often much more satisfactory. I, therefore, favor the greatest possible latitude in admitting students to the stacks. Let us cut our losses by taking the trouble to scrutinize rigorously all who leave the building, but inside the building let us have the greatest possible freedom in order that all whom we serve, even though they be not above the rank of undergraduate, may really have direct contact with the books upon our shelves.

Plan for the Future

The more we have worked at our problems at Pennsylvania, the more strongly the conviction has been borne in upon us that, however carefully we plan, conditions which we had not anticipated will arise in the years that lie ahead which will necessitate important interior changes. We are, therefore, determined to have a building laid out on what I believe is commonly called the "unit principle," or the "unit plan," the purpose of which is to make possible easy and relatively inexpensive rearrangements of the interior structure. The present declared policy of the University of Pennsylvania looks to the mainte-

nance of a fairly uniform student attendance after the war and, theoretically, therefore, it ought to be possible to plan a library which, in the spaces allotted to service and to administration, would be very nearly permanently satisfactory, leaving only the space devoted to book storage to plague the future with the problem of expansion. But who shall say that the present declared policy of the university will not change or that conceptions of the space requirements of library service and administration will remain unaltered? To my way of thinking the most unchanging thing about this problem of library planning is the fact of change itself. It seems to me not at all unlikely that as the uncertain future unfolds before us, we shall find ourselves wanting to make an interchange of space even between the three major portions of our building which are devoted to book storage, to service, and to administration; and, therefore, we are asking that the whole building be planned horizontally in standard distances equal to the distance between the centers of the uprights supporting the ranks of the stacks (4 ft., 5 in.) and that vertically it be planned in standard distances equal to the height of one story of the stacks (7 ft., 7 in.). It is my understanding that standard sections of wall, designed for use in "unit plan" buildings, are now being manufactured, which may be taken down and re-erected without serious waste. This is a subject about which I am not well informed, but on the basis of present information I favor a very extensive use of such removable walls. In any case, I favor a building so constructed as to give the greatest practicable inner flexibility so that present decisions—which with the greatest possible care and wisdom may soon be outmoded—may bind and embarrass those who come after us as little as may be.

Ventilation and Lighting

In view of the incurable noisiness and atmospheric dirtiness of the location which we have been obliged to choose, it seems to me imperative that our new building shall be in some degree soundproofed and that it shall be artificially ventilated throughout and air-conditioned. At least the stacks must be air-conditioned, and I personally am convinced that for the location which we have chosen and in a climate such as we have in Philadelphia, the entire building should be air-conditioned. I acknowledge the defects of air-conditioning as at present operated, but strides of progress are currently being made, and I believe there is good reason to expect that soon after the war it will be possible to get an installation of air-conditioning apparatus which will give a highly satisfactory result.

It is of the utmost importance that our new library be as perfectly lighted as possible. Time was when this requirement would have called for a great deal of attention to natural lighting, and in a building of the contemplated magnitude it would have been necessary to have large light wells to prevent the interior from being impossibly dark. However, such wells take up a lot of precious space and cause a building to be badly "spread out," and with the progress of artificial lighting it now seems possible to do away with such interior wells. They are still used very effectively in so recent and admirable a building as the library of the University of Illinois, but in a situation such as we have at Pennsylvania, where space is very limited, it is clear to me that we should do our utmost to get a satisfactory installation of artificial lighting and that we should pay less attention than we would have done a few years ago to natural lighting.

I am sure that you must all be conscious, as I am even painfully conscious, of the

difficulties of getting a building with the very best devices of air-conditioning, artificial lighting, etc., such as I have called for. I am sure too that any of you who have actually tried to plan so great and complex a structure as a university library are conscious, even as I am conscious, of your inadequacy for the task. I am certain that there would be much to be gained if those of us who are struggling with planning postwar libraries—a fairly numerous company—could come together in a series of conferences and endeavor to help one another through discussion of mutual problems and through listening to representatives of the building trades and others who may be able to help us. I was, therefore, delighted when I learned that President Dodds, of Princeton, had taken the initiative in promoting such a series of conferences and I very much hope that this effort will meet with early success.

Interior Arrangement

Time is lacking for me to do more than speak of a few of the features of interior arrangement which we hope to get in our new building.

I am more than anxious that we shall have upon our main floor an arrangement of service desks, catalogs, reading and reference space, bibliographical service, and essential nonpublic department work which shall make for the most economical and efficient operation possible for a library of such dimensions as ours. The problem is particularly difficult because we have to provide for such large collections of catalog cards. Apart from our shelflist, we have three large catalogs. We have, first, the catalog of the university libraries (this is the most frequently used); second, the Philadelphia Union Library Catalogue (the next most frequently used); and third, the Library of Congress Depository Catalog,

which has been reinforced so that it too is a union catalog. This last, as you all know, is in process of being printed, and I personally would think it logical to remove it and depend on the printed text. But the printed text falls short of being really satisfactory for use with the naked eye and it has certain other drawbacks which facilitate an easy argument against it. There is, therefore, intelligent resistance to the proposal to remove the depository catalog, and what our ultimate decision will be I shall not at present undertake to say. In any case, it is clear that our problem of interior arrangement at the principal service center of our proposed new library is much complicated by the necessity of providing for large and much-used collections of catalog cards.

But, whatever the difficulties, we shall do our utmost to provide, in a convenient working arrangement on the main floor, for the catalogs above mentioned, for the circulation desk and service, for the main and reference reading room and reference service desk, for the periodicals reading room and service desk, for the Philadelphia Bibliographical Center—an independent, but essential, collaborator which we have agreed to house—for a bibliography room, for working space for the accessions and cataloging departments, and probably, though not certainly, for the main administrative offices. If it is found that all these features cannot be accommodated on the main floor without sacrifice of stack space at this level, I am fully prepared to face such a sacrifice, for I am convinced that such an assembly on the main floor is really necessary in the interest of efficiency, though time is lacking at this moment to explain more fully the layout which I have in mind.¹

¹ The circulation desk is the center of the library's activity and should occupy a fairly central position, and the distance from the main entrance of the build-

Seminar Rooms

Of the detailed arrangements which we have in mind for the lower floor and for the upper floors of our building, there is also not time to speak. We are making fairly extensive plans for rare book or treasure rooms and for special collections, since Philadelphia seems to us to be a city in need of such equipment and since it has long been a center of book collecting on such a scale as to encourage us in trying to develop an outstanding collection of treasures. Our plan for seminar rooms will perhaps be of interest to you. To carry on a small seminar tradition (which has now come to be of fairly long standing at Pennsylvania), we propose to have a good many seminar rooms opening off from a corridor from which there will be direct access to the stacks. The rooms will be of two types and several sizes. Type A, of which one will be assigned to every teaching department so desiring, will be primarily study

ing to it should be kept as short as circumstances will permit. Opposite the circulation desk, or in any case close at hand, should be located the catalog of the university libraries. The main and reference reading room, by reason of its very size, must extend to a considerable distance, but it must be clearly borne in mind that there is heavy traffic between it and the circulation desk and the university libraries catalog, and, therefore, distances should be kept as short as possible. Also it must be remembered that the main reading room houses the principal reference collections of our libraries and that the reference service desk is a principal feature of it. This desk should be so located as not only to give the reference librarian easy command of the room but also as to make it possible for him to make frequent use of the catalogs, of the bibliography room, and of the Bibliographical Center, while moving over the shortest distances which circumstances will permit. The Bibliographical Center, which makes constant use of the Philadelphia Union Catalogue and must have it right under its hand, needs also to have convenient access to the bibliography room and to the main reference collections in the main reading room as well as to the L.C. Depository Catalog. I hope it will be possible to have the bibliography room located at some convenient point between the Bibliographical Center and the main reading room. Finally, it is of much importance that the work space used by the accessions and cataloging departments shall be so located as to give them easy access to the depository catalog and to the university libraries catalog, with access to the bibliography room, the Bibliographical Center, and the main reference collections not too far beyond. The periodicals room, with its service desk, will, I am convinced, have to be located at some distance from the main center of library activity, but I am extremely anxious to keep it on the main floor, and I suggest that it be so located as to open off from one end of the main reading and reference room and that there be a direct passage from it to the traffic center at the circulation desk and the university libraries catalog.

rooms with shelving for pertinent book collections. Type B will be soundproofed and will be designed for the holding of classes. The type A rooms will be arranged in pairs with a type B room between each pair. Thus it will be possible for research to be carried on in the type A rooms without disturbance while classes are being held in the adjoining rooms of type B.

Finally, let me say something about stacks. It is, I believe, generally agreed that stacks should have a central location and that other parts of the library should be built around them, but I am not convinced that it is wise to have stacks entirely surrounded by other parts of the building. Such an arrangement spreads out other parts of the building and tends to decentralize service and give long and time-consuming lines of communication. To have the stacks surrounded on three sides seems to me as far as we ought to go.

It has been customary for a good many years for stacks to be constructed in the form of a deep well or tower of the same, or nearly the same, dimensions all the way up and to have them pretty well sealed off from the rest of the building by a surrounding wall. Such an arrangement doubtless makes for certain economies, but I have come to doubt the necessity or desirability of having stacks so rigorously separated from other parts of a library and I believe that such an arrangement may make for uneconomical and inefficient planning of other parts of the building. In our own case it seems to me probable that stacks of adequate and uniform size carried from the bottom to the top of our building would interfere seriously with the efficient, centralized plan of reading rooms and services which we want on the main floor. Therefore, as I have already indicated, I am recommending that our stacks at this level be cut far into in order to get the space

which we need for main floor features. On the other hand, on the upper floors and on the lower floor it seems to me likely that we shall have more space than we need for nonstack features, and, therefore, I am proposing that at these levels the stacks be broadened out to cover a larger area.

Stack Capacity

As to the over-all size of our stacks, we are planning for a capacity of about two million volumes. By this, I mean two million volumes when the shelves are about 80 per cent filled with books, for no library can function with its shelves completely full. One mentions such figures with strange emotion. So far as I know, no library has ever been built with stacks that were large enough; and now we have all been reading Fremont Rider's revolutionary book² with its appalling formula according to which research libraries double every sixteen years and its brilliant proposal that a large part of our research collections be put in microprint on the backs of catalog cards. Does this proposal perhaps mean that great book stacks are no longer needed? Mr. Rider himself, in spite of the enthusiasm with which he has advanced his proposal, does not think so. But how large stacks shall we need? I personally am convinced that Mr. Rider's book will, perhaps in the fairly near future, lead to revolutionary consequences, that large classes of our research materials will be placed on micro-cards, and that much of the pressure

² Rider, Fremont. *The Scholar and the Future of the Research Library*. New York City, Hadham Press, 1944. 236p.

on our book stacks will be relieved. Yet I am not anticipating the complete overthrow of our traditional library economy, and my present guess is—it is little more than a guess—that we shall not make a mistake in going ahead and building stacks in our new library for approximately two million volumes. Moreover, I am still of the opinion that we need to contemplate the possibility of our stacks becoming overfull in the not very distant future and that we still need to build with an eye to possible expansion. For us there seem to be two possibilities, and we are asking our architects to explore both. One is to go higher into the air, the other is to go to the westward underground. Of the two alternatives, the underground solution seems to me preferable, but I am not sure, and happily it is not my responsibility to make the decision.

When shall we have this library of our dreams? I wish I could give a definite answer to this important question, but I dare not. This much I can say: The University of Pennsylvania recognizes such a new library to be its first need. We have studied our requirements and have agreed upon them in considerable detail. They have now been turned over to the architects, who are in the stage of making preliminary studies and drawings. But the road that lies between preliminary drawings and a finished building of the contemplated magnitude is a long and arduous one and, as I said in the beginning, the world into which we are coming after the war is to me a dark subject. I repeat: We are confronted with a situation which calls for faith.