THE PLANNING AND FORMAL OPENING OF LIBRARY HALL

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On November 11, 1959, the American Philosophical Society formally opened its new Library Hall—the first building planned to house the valuable books and manuscripts collected over the two preceding centuries. The decision to erect this building was not reached lightly, but grew out of the conviction that the collections should be maintained and made available under favorable conditions to all serious readers. The Society recognized an obligation to preserve its Library as a part of the cultural heritage of the American people.

For those familiar with the Society’s history, the completion of Library Hall had much of the fascination of a dream come true. For at intervals, ever since the first few books had been acquired before the Revolution, the problems of housing and servicing them had presented difficulties. For a long period after 1789 the Library remained in Philosophical Hall, where certain adjustments were eventually made in order to accommodate it. After some sixty years the Hall began to seem inadequate for the Society as a whole, and in 1866 George B. Wood was appointed chairman of a group of trustees who were to raise a fund “for the erection of a fire-proof building.” How successful this effort was is unknown, but such amounts as were raised were apparently spent on remodeling and on the addition of a third floor to the Hall in 1890. Although the new floor provided enough space for the Library at the time, it also became inadequate after another two decades and the collections began to spill over into the basement.

In retrospect, the successive difficulties encountered in caring for the Library were inevitable under the circumstances. Given an active Society within an expanding city and nation, at a time when scholarly publications were proliferating, the growth of the Library was certain to outstrip its physical bounds. This was the experience not only of the Philosophical Society but also of its sister institutions in Philadelphia.

The College of Physicians, for example, was also lodged in Philosophical Hall from 1791 to 1845; after which the growth of its library led to migrations to rooms elsewhere, then to a building of its own in 1863, and finally to its present home on Twenty-second Street in 1909. Likewise the Library Company, which constructed the original Library Hall across the street from Philosophical Hall in 1790, finally gave up that building about 1880 and moved to two locations—the one on, and the other near, South Broad Street.

It will be noted that while these two institutions moved westward with the center of the city, the Philosophical Society remained in the original area. There, on the one square of Fifth Street between Chestnut and Walnut, had been located in 1800 the first scientific society, the first circulating library, the first museum, the first medical academy, and the first medical school building in the United States. No other short thoroughfare is of such significance in the cultural traditions of the nation. But by mid-twentieth century the Philosophical Society, alone among the original occupants, remained on this historic site.

The Society, it is true, also sensed the impulse to move westward with the city. In 1900 a new Building Fund 1 was started and the Girard Trust Company was made the depositary and trustee. By 1928, this Fund amounted to about $80,000. In that year, during the presidency of Dr. Francis X. Dercum, the Society decided to institute a campaign to increase the amount and engaged the John Price Jones Corporation as adviser. In November, 1929, Mr. Eldridge R. Johnson, National Treasurer of the Fund, reported that 296 subscriptions totaling $978,465 had been received. It was intended by this time to use the Fund to erect a building for the Society on the Parkway—on a lot which the City of Philadelphia contracted to convey to the Society in exchange for Philosophical Hall. Subsequently, however, sentiment for retaining the old Hall was aroused. The contract for exchange of property was then

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1 This is variously referred to in the records as the Building Fund, the Building and Endowment Fund, and the Benjamin Franklin Endowment Fund.
abrogated and the City Council re-affirmed the Society’s title to the property at Independence Square.

When the Society decided to remain in Philosophical Hall, the problem of housing the Library became acute. Consequently, in 1934, the collections were moved across Fifth Street into quarters rented in the Drexel Building. This arrangement, while not a permanently satisfactory one, provided more space than had hitherto been available. It also set a precedent—one can now see—for locating the Library elsewhere than in Philosophical Hall.

Meantime, the Society confronted the problem of the proper use of the Building Fund. In 1937 Roland S. Morris, as President, inquired of each donor to the Fund whether the gift might be used for the future erection of a building which would be a monument to Franklin, and which would also provide for the Library and for other activities of the Society. The donors agreed almost without exception to the proposal. Of the funds thus made available, $215,476 was later (1948–49) spent on removing the third floor of Philosophical Hall in order to restore the original appearance of that building. By 1958, nevertheless, nearly $1,000,000 was at hand in the Building Fund.

The Society’s resources for a future building had also been increased by a bequest in 1935 of the residuary estate of Walter Wood, consisting of about $150,000 in cash and securities and a substantial amount of real estate. This bequest, known as the Wood Memorial Fund, was given in memory of his uncle, George B. Wood, his brothers, Richard and Stuart Wood, and his cousin, Horatio C. Wood—all of whom had been members of the Society. The Wood Fund was to be used first for an adequate building, but any surplus could be expended for such other activities as the Society might determine. In 1958 this Fund also had assets of nearly $1,000,000. Hence the Society, in the combined Building and Woods Funds, had available by that time about $2,000,000 for construction purposes.

The immediate stimulus to the erection of a separate library building, with the implication that Philosophical Hall would be retained for the Society’s other activities, resulted from the convergence of two trends during the 1930’s and forties. The first was the development of the Federal Government’s plan for the creation of the Independence National Historical Park. These plans were inspired in part by the Independence Hall Association, a voluntary body in which certain members of the Society—such as Judge Edwin O. Lewis, Dr. William E. Lingelbach, and the Honorable Roland S. Morris—played a leading part. The governmental authorities decided to clear most of the area between Chestnut and Walnut Streets, east of Fifth Street, as a Federal Mall within the new Park.

A second trend, during these years, was the growing concern among some members of the Society for the more effective care and use of the Library. When the collections were moved to the Drexel Building in 1934, interest was aroused in their eventual fate and there was some discussion of the value of maintaining them. In response, a special Committee on the Library recommended in 1941 that the Library should be maintained and that a separate building should be provided for it. These recommendations were approved by the Society.

In view of the decision to erect a separate library building, Dr. Lingelbach and others proposed that the Society reconstruct in modified form—the original site—the old Library Hall of the Library Company. Such a reconstruction would not only be architecturally appropriate, but would be conveniently located on the Mall directly across Fifth Street from Philosophical Hall. The proposal was approved by the Society in 1951, providing that the use of the land were authorized by the Federal Government.

The drafting of a petition to this effect was left to the Committee on Library. At the suggestion of the Advisory Commission on the Independence National Historical Park, the request was incorporated in a bill known as H.R. 6544, 82nd Congress, 2nd Session, February 11, 1952. The bill was passed by both Houses of Congress and signed by the President in July of that year. The pertinent section of the act stated that the Secretary of the Interior was authorized to permit the Society to construct and operate, on the site mentioned, a building to house the Society’s Library and any additions thereto. Such permission was to be granted pursuant to a lease or contract without charge, on such terms as were approved by the Secretary and by the Society, and for such length of time as the building was
used for library purposes—provided that construc-
tion plans were approved by the Secretary.2

Subsequent to these favorable developments in
Washington, the approaching demolition of the
Drexel Building necessitated in 1954 the removal
of the Library thence to the U. S. Fidelity and
Guaranty Building a short distance south on
Fifth Street. While the collections were tempo-
rarily housed at this location, the Society pro-
ceeded with the steps necessary to a construction
program. The plans of Mr. Sydney E. Martin,
who was engaged as architect, called for a hand-
some, Georgian edifice which contained two floors
above and two below ground—all to be air-
conditioned and furnished with modern equip-
ment. The main reading room was to be similar
to that in old Library Hall, and the Fifth Street
façade was to be in complete conformity with
that of the original building.3 The total effect
in mind was to reproduce the appearance of the
Fifth Street site, as it had appeared from Inde-
pendence Square at the end of the eighteenth
century.

The Committee on Library considered Mr.
Martin’s plans as these were presented. Aided
by Mr. Emerson Greenaway of the Free Library,
engaged as consultant, the Committee made
specific suggestions which resulted in several
modifications of interior design. On June 21,
1956, the plans were approved by the Honorable
Fred A. Seaton, Secretary of the Interior, and
by Dr. William J. Robbins, President of the
Society. And on November 16, the site was
formally transferred to the Society by Conrad L.
Wirth, Director of the National Park Service.

Meantime, President Owen J. Roberts had
appointed Mr. M. Albert Linton Chairman of a
special Building Committee, which had responsi-
bility for handling financial arrangements. A
contract for building the new Library Hall was
made with J. S. Cornell and Son. Contracts were
likewise made with the engineering firm of
Charles S. Leopold, for the installation of air-
conditioning equipment, and with the New York
sculptor Lewis Iselin, Jr., for a reproduction
of the statue of Franklin which had once graced the
façade of old Library Hall.

2 The full text of this section is given in Lingelbach,
3 On the history and design of old Library Hall (1790),
see Peterson, Charles E., Library Hall: home of the

Since this statue dominated the front of the old
Hall—as it does that of the new Hall today—it
merits a further word here. No such arrange-
ment appeared in the plans on which the old Hall
had apparently been based, but there were prece-
dents in earlier London buildings as well as in
Italian prototypes.4 The original statue, the work
of the Italian Lazzarini, is still in the possession
of the Library Company; and with the latter’s
permission, this was used as the model for Mr.
Iselin’s reproduction.

Construction of the new Hall was begun in
June, 1957. Somewhat delayed during the re-
moval of the very solid foundations of the Drexel
Building, it proceeded steadily thereafter. In
addition to supervision by Mr. Martin, opera-
tions were watched over by Dr. Robbins as

4 An excellent illustration of London precedents is
the “Blue Boy School,” still standing on Caxton Street
near Victoria Road in Westminster. In this building of
the 1720’s, a statue of a “Blue Boy” occupies the same
position as did that of Franklin over the entrance to
the old Hall.
President of the Society. The cornerstone was laid with appropriate ceremonies on April 25, 1958, and the structure was practically completed in October of 1959. Also completed, by that time, was the custom-made furniture designed by Saybolt and Cleland in period forms appropriate to the Georgian interior.

The transfer of the Library's collections began in September, 1959. This was a complex process, since it involved not only a design for locating materials in Library Hall, but also synchronization with the moving of old stacks and the ordering and installation of new ones. But under the able direction of Mrs. Gertrude Hess, Assistant Librarian, the staff cooperated effectively in bringing the transfer to a successful conclusion by early November. This was just in time for the opening celebration, which was scheduled for November 11.

Plans for this occasion were made by the Committee on Meetings. The date selected was the day preceding the regular Autumn Meeting of the Society—an arrangement convenient for members in attendance. It was decided to open the celebration with an afternoon program in Philosophical Hall, where addresses would be given by librarians of the Philadelphia area. This was to be followed by a dinner, at which formal greetings could be extended by appropriate Federal officials and by representatives of outstanding European and American libraries. The program was to close with an informal reception in Library Hall, which would mark the official opening of the building. In addition to the members of the Society, many guests were invited from all parts of the country.

The afternoon meeting was well attended. Dr. Kenneth Setton, Librarian of the University of Pennsylvania, read a thoughtful paper on "From Medieval to Modern Libraries" which was...
devoted in part to the medieval background of modern institutions. Mr. Emerson Greenaway, Director of the Free Library of Philadelphia, presented a clear analysis of "The Relation of Library Buildings to Library Functions"; and Dr. Richard H. Shryock discussed specifically "The Library of the American Philosophical Society."5

At the conclusion of the papers, Dr. Roy F. Nichols—Chairman of the Administrative Board of the Franklin Papers—announced that the Yale University Press had brought out the first volume of the Papers. This happy event had long been anticipated, and Dr. Nichols commented on its significance to the Society in general and to its Library in particular. In conclusion, he delivered a presentation copy to Dr. Henry Allen Moe, as President of the Society.6

The dinner, held at the aptly-named Benjamin Franklin Hotel, was presided over by Dr. Moe. Some 375 members and guests attended. Following Dr. Moe's gracious introductions, formal greetings were extended by the following men in the names of their respective institutions: The Honorable Roger Ernst, Assistant Secretary of the Interior; Mr. Rutherford D. Rogers, Chief Assistant Librarian of the Library of Congress; Sir Charles Galton Darwin, Fellow of the Royal Society; M. Julien Cain, L'Administrateur Général of the Bibliothèque Nationale; Mr. F. C. Francis, Director of the British Museum; the Right Rev. Anselm M. Albareda, O.S.B., Il Prefetto of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana; and Dr. Nicholas Wainwright, President of the Library Company.7

The dinner culminated in the presentation of Library Hall to the Society by Dr. William E. Lingelbach, Librarian Emeritus, who had done so much to bring the Hall into being, and by Mr. Sydney E. Martin, Architect, who had designed it. The presentation was accepted by Dr. Moe on behalf of the Society.

5 These papers appear in the present issue of the Society's Proceedings.
6 The remarks made by Drs. Nichols and Moe on this occasion are published in the Year Book of the Society for 1959: 182-185, 1960.
7 These formal greetings appear in the present issue of the Proceedings. Also published here are the papers which were presented the next day, as part of the Autumn program of the Society, by M. Cain, by Mr. Francis, and by the Right Rev. A. M. Albareda.
Fig. 6. Library Hall first floor. 1, Reading room. 2, Franklin Room. 3, Manuscripts. 4, Microfilms. 5, Vault. 6, Corridor. 7, Cataloguer. 8, Assistant Librarian. 9, Secretary. 10, Librarian. 11, Study.

Fig. 7. Library Hall second floor. 12, Stack area. 13, Maps, prints, and medals. 14, Work room. 15, Corridor. 16, Recording room. 17, Restoration laboratory. 18, Board room. 19, Staff lounge. 20, Sick bay.
Fig. 8. Library Hall basement floor. 21. Stack area. 22, Vault. 23, Storage. 24, Janitor. 25, Photographic laboratory.

Fig. 9. Library Hall sub-basement floor. 26, Stack area. 27, Mechanical equipment. 28, Vault.
At about nine in the evening, members and guests reassembled for an informal reception at the new Hall. As they approached it, the dignity of the exterior and particularly of the Fifth Street façade, was made apparent by illumination. Entering the main doorway, they found the same classic lines within the structure—notably in the ornate yet gracious reading room and along the central hallway which led from it to the rear of the building. The restful color tones used on walls and the appropriate furnishings lent a pleasing effect to the entire interior.

Other features of the building may be described as they now appear, and as guests observed them on the evening of November 11. The main reading room is located at the front of the first or ground floor. Here the reference librarian's desk faces the catalogue cases along the east wall; and the latter are adjacent to doors leading on one side to the cataloguer's office, and on the other into the manuscripts room. Balconies extend along the walls at each end of the reading room. Near the entrance is a small study now used for shelving some three hundred volumes from Franklin's own library, as well as many books about him. All these arrangements are convenient, and may be made more clear by consulting the floor plans presented herewith.

Opening from the rear of the manuscripts room on the north side of the first floor, is a burglar-proof vault which has five levels and is served by a dumb-waiter. On the south side of the same floor, running from front to rear, are the offices of the cataloguer, of the assistant librarian, and of the librarian—all opening into the central hallway mentioned and all having easy access one to another. The hallway is bisected, midway from front to rear, by a side entrance from Library Street; and exhibition cases are built into the walls of this area for the benefit of the public. It is this entrance which will be used ordinarily, rather than that in the front of the building.

On display at the rear of the central hallway is an illuminated volume which commemorates the names of all those who contributed to the Building Fund and to the Wood Memorial Fund. The following inscription appears on the first page:

This building, a memorial to Benjamin Franklin, lover of useful knowledge, was constructed with contributions from more than three hundred and fifty individuals. Their names are gratefully inscribed in this volume preserved here in Library Hall of the American Philosophical Society which serves scholarship in the nation and in the world at large.

Stairways and elevators are available at the front and at the rear of the building. Both the basement and sub-basement are devoted primarily to stacks; but the basement also contains a photographic laboratory and the sub-basement houses some of the mechanical equipment. Midway between the basement and the first floor, at the rear, is the service entrance—a location close to the main elevator.

The front of the second floor and a mezzanine above it, are occupied by stacks. Centrally located on the second floor are two relatively large rooms—one a general work area and the other devoted to maps, medals, and prints. In the rear are the restorer's laboratory, a handsome board or committee room, and a small staff lounge. Above the second floor is an attic which holds much of the air-conditioning equipment, and which also affords some space for storage.

Library Hall provides much more space than was hitherto available, both for staff and for the housing and use of the collections. Allowance has been made for future expansion, from the present approximate holdings of 115,000 volumes to about 300,000 volumes. The air-conditioning will minister to the comfort of the staff and simultaneously to the more effective preservation of books and manuscripts. In a word, the new building combines the beauty of Georgian forms with the efficiency of modern functions.

This fact, in itself, did something for the morale of those involved in the operation of the Library. Within a few days after moving, everyone seemed to adjust smoothly to new locations. At the same time, the dedication ceremonies attracted the attention of librarians near and far, and brought requests from various local societies to meet in or otherwise visit Library Hall. It is hoped that, in this way, our relations with other institutions and library groups in Philadelphia can be actively maintained.

The more general future policies of the Library are discussed elsewhere in this issue of the Proceedings. But it is encouraging to report, meantime, that the Library is now better equipped than ever before to promote the activities of the American Philosophical Society.