
THE LIBRARY JOURNAL



The Rush Rhees Library at the University of Rochester

By DONALD B. GILCHRIST

Librarian

THE NEW PLANT and River Campus of the College for Men of the University of Rochester, located on the banks of the Genesee River in the outskirts of the city, were formally dedicated October 10-12, 1930. It was a particularly interesting occasion in that all eleven structures in the group were new, and coordinated in the plan for economical and effective service. The architectural treatment, Colonial in type, is also harmonious throughout. The academic buildings about the main quadrangle, occupying the highest ridge of the campus, are of the early Greek Revival, with connecting colonnades and balustrades, while the so-called domestic group on the lower campus is Georgian. Except for its architectural dominance of the campus and its restrained, dignified interior which attracted the particular attention of delegates and guests, the library played no special part in the general dedication ceremonies, and hence was not fully described at that time.

A brief résumé of the origins of the building is timely by way of introduction, for the conception of such a structure does not grow over night. For the general arrangement of the building the librarian has been largely responsible, cooperating very closely throughout the planning process with Gordon & Kaelber, the University architects. In the course of the preliminary study they visited all uni-

versity libraries as far west as the University of Minnesota, which have been built in the last twenty years and in which the library service is at all analogous with that of Rochester.

The first real plans for the building were drawn in 1925, following a preliminary plan drawn by the librarian as early as 1921, when it was tentatively proposed to include in the building the library of the new School of Medicine. Plans were completed and ground broken in January, 1929, and the building was enclosed in October, 1929.

The library stands across the head of the main quadrangle, with balustrades of granite connecting it with the liberal arts building on the north side and the physics building on the south. It has a frontage of 185 feet and a depth of 188 feet to the rear of the stack tower, which rises to a total height of 186 feet above the quadrangle level. This commanding tower, of original design, has excited very general admiration by its massive and graceful lines. Its upper portion, encircled by two graduated tiers of stone pillars, the lower of which constitutes an open colonnade, is illuminated on occasions by a permanent battery of 168 flood lights of 250 watts each, while in its summit are the Hopeman Memorial Chimes of seventeen bells, with a total weight of 32,000 pounds.

The central part of the front façade and all the trim are of Indiana limestone, the re-

mainder of Harvard brick. Above the main entrance is a classic portico of six Doric pillars, surmounted by a heavy, hand-carved stone pediment, showing a decorative group of four human figures, two kneeling and two seated, and two lions, centered about the University seal. This carving was done by A. A. Ardolino of New York, who worked on the Lincoln Memorial in Washington and other notable structures, east and west. It required nearly six months for completion, some of the design showing a relief as deep as eighteen inches.

In the frieze across the front of the building are carved the names of Aristotle, Augustine, Descartes, Newton, Kant, Franklin, Darwin, Plato, Vergil, Dante, Goethe and Shakespeare, in a sense memorial to those early intellectuals.

The broad entrance steps are of granite, surmounted on either side by a large ornamental, stone urn, eight feet in height and decorated with scroll work in relief. On the face of the building back of these urns are carved, in five-inch letters, two inscriptions, as follows:

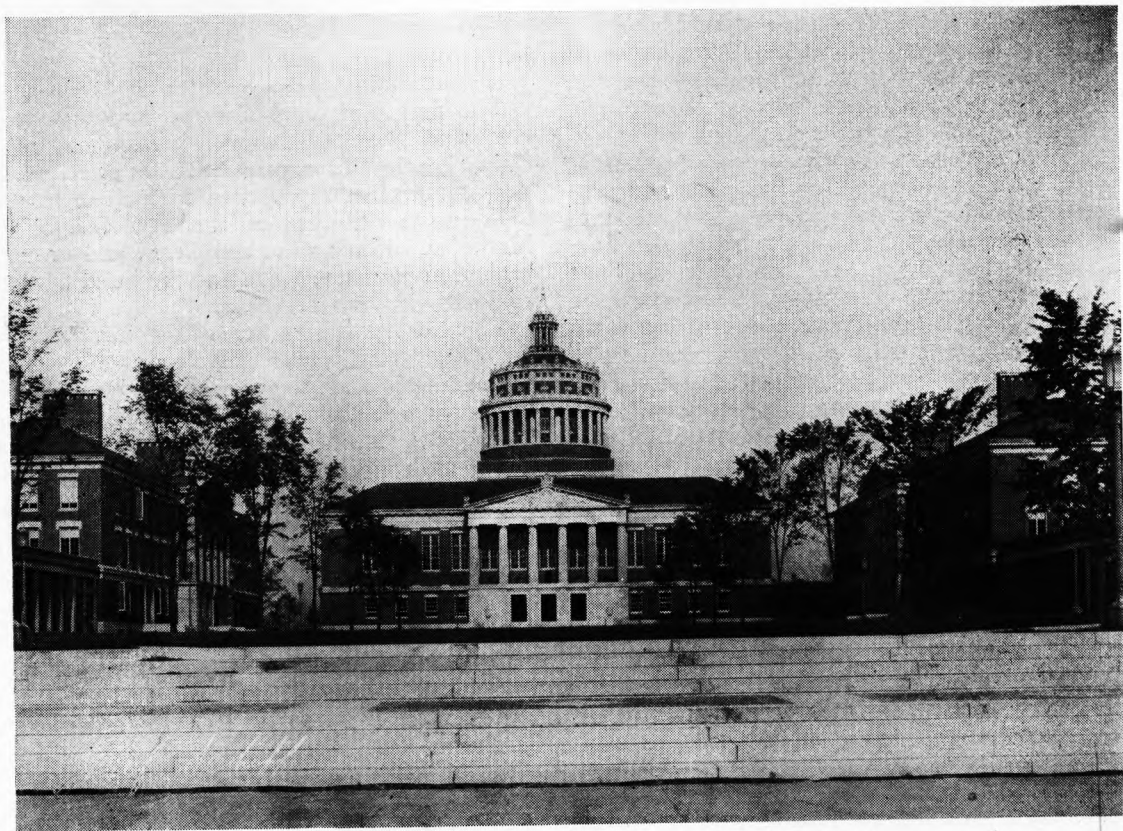
HERE IS THE HISTORY, OF HUMAN IGNORANCE FOLLY WAR AND WASTE RECORDED BY HUMAN INTELLIGENCE FOR THE ADMONITION OF WISER AGES STILL TO COME

HERE IS THE HISTORY OF MAN'S HUNGER FOR TRUTH GOODNESS AND BEAUTY LEADING HIM SLOWLY ON THROUGH FLESH TO SPIRIT FROM BONDAGE TO FREEDOM FROM WAR TO PEACE

Professor John R. Slater, head of the English department, is the author of these inscriptions.

The main entrance consists of three sets of double, teakwood doors, with heavy plate glass panels protected by decorative bronze grilles, incorporating early printers' marks, and in the lower panels the following inscriptions, also of Professor Slater's authorship, are carved in the wood, arranged from left to right:

"The doors of the past open to those who seek to know what has been—the history of the stars, the earth, sunlight, life and man's long journey; The doors of the present open to those who seek to know what man can do—to master his fate by science, sustain his spirit by art and guide his life by wisdom; and The doors of the future open to those who wonder what life may become—when



The Rush Rhees Library, surmounted by its imposing stack tower

men are free in body and soul, loving all beauty, serving in many ways one God."

The entrance opens onto the mosaic marble floor of the main lobby or foyer, measuring 34 feet in width and 80 feet deep. The walls are finished in Indiana limestone and colon-

a fireplace, comfortable furniture and other luxurious accoutrements of a private club. The expense of furnishing and equipping this room was borne jointly by two alumni, Francis R. Welles, '75, and Charles A. Brown, '79, both members of the Board of Trustees.

The Treasure Room, with paneling and bookcases in American walnut, protected by bronze grilled doors and leather walls, has been equipped and furnished by Mr. Edward G. Miner of Rochester, secretary of the Board of Trustees. A large vault for the most precious documents and books opens directly from this room and provides a sanctuary for the early editions, original manuscripts, rare documents, autographs of famous men and other real treasures, of which the library already has quite a store.

Also on the ground floor are coat rooms, rest rooms, a lecture room, accommodating 150 people which is also used for exhibits, and space for the future expansion of reserve reading work, at present used for an exhibit of



The Welles-Brown Room is dedicated to the enjoyment of good books

naded with fluted stone pillars. Recessed between these pillars are exhibit cases. Above the exhibit cases on the left are bronzed medallions of the Muses and in the stone lintel of the entrance to the Welles-Brown Room dedicated to the enjoyment of good books, is a carved head of Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses and Goddess of Memory. Above the exhibit cases opposite, medallions symbolize the various methods of recording human thought from Papyrus to Typesetting, and over the entrance to the required reading room is a carved head of Minerva, Goddess of Wisdom.

At the rear of the lobby is the double grand stairway, having solid stone balustrades with early printers' marks of different periods and nations cut in the stone.

Both reading rooms on the first floor measure 42 by 72 feet. The required reading room will accommodate 120 people and has an open shelf capacity of 7,000 volumes. The Welles-Brown Room, accommodating 5,000 choice volumes, has oak-paneled walls, a stained glass memorial window in a recess at the north end,



The Treasure Room protects and displays the library's rarities

architectural materials, plans, casts and details relating to the development of the River Campus.

In the stair hall at the second floor level are two statues of more than lifesize, one of Minerva in full regalia, symbolizing Knowledge, and one symbolizing Industry. These

statues, in common with all sculpturing in or on the building, are the joint work, in each instance of three different craftsmen. All of the designs have been drawn by Philipp Merz, of the Gordon & Kaelber staff, and all of the carving done by A. A. Ardolino, of New York, or representatives under his supervision. The intermediate modeling process for the pediment in front and the heads over the reading room doors was done by Ulysses Ricci, of New York, who did the figures in the Eastman Theatre and for the statues by William Mues, recently from Germany.

The second floor is the working floor of the library. Across the greater part of the front is the high-ceilinged, main reading room, measuring 42 by 110 feet. It has a seating capacity of 220 at its tables and will accommodate 20,000 volumes on open shelves.

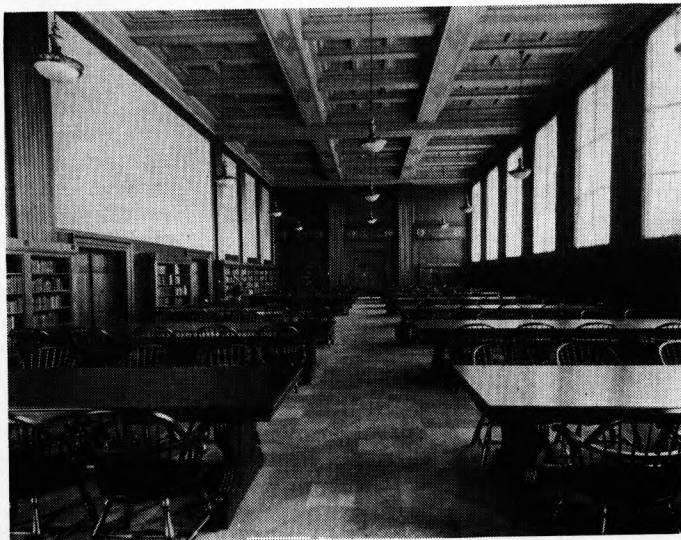
North of the main reading room is a smoking room, 36 by 42 feet, while at the other end is the bibliographical and reference room of similar dimensions, which will accommodate 3,000 volumes.

At the rear of the stair hall is the public card index and loan department. On the south side is the periodical room, measuring 28 by 64 feet, which will take 10,000 volumes on its open shelves. On the other side, and extending to the rear of the building, is the administrative division, including staff offices, cataloging and order departments.

The third floor is given over to seminars, of which there are twelve of varying sizes, and to staff rest rooms, adequately furnished and equipped. The fourth floor is reserved for future development, with possibilities for more than twenty additional seminars. This floor is built about a central, open court in which are two skylights, one over the stair hall and one over the public card index room. At the sides of this court are ten private studies, which are available for faculty members or visiting scholars engaged in research.

The basement, which has full clearance above ground level except at the front of the building, is largely unoccupied, at present accommodating only the newspaper room which will accommodate 3,000 volumes, a bindery and a service room for the building maintenance staff.

While the number of volumes moved to the new library during the summer was approximately 150,000, the initial capacity of the building, as equipped at the outset, is 676,000 volumes, and the present structure, when fully equipped, will have a capacity of more than 1,000,000 volumes. The tower, as erected, provides for an ultimate stack of nineteen levels, of which only eight are now provided, although the elevators run to the top. When eventually developed, this will be the highest bookstack in the world, so far as



The high-ceilinged main Reading Room serves 220 readers and can hold 20,000 volumes.

can be determined from libraries now existent or in the process of building. The plans for the ultimate development of the new library call for additional construction to the rear, which will place the stack tower in the center of the completed structure and give the library of the future a total capacity of more than 2,000,000 volumes.

The tower is 62 feet square, and accommodates 44,000 volumes and ten cubicles on each level. Service from the stack to the loan desk is expedited by an automatic continuous conveyor now being operated at about 70 feet per minute but geared to be run at over 100 feet per minute when the upper reaches of the stack towers are occupied. Call slips are sent to all levels by 1½" pneumatic tubes. Snead & Co. installed the stacks and conveyor, Lamson Co. the tube system.

Gordon & Kaelber of Rochester were the architects, Phillip Merz architectural designer, Charles A. Platt of New York consulting architect. A. W. Hopeman Sons of Rochester were the general contractors for the entire River Campus project.