

## THE BIRTH — AND REBIRTH — OF A LIBRARY BUILDING

A building is a combination of dreams, hopes and needs. Its final size dictates cost, but its real challenge in design arises from the complexity of the job it must do for those who will use it.

University library buildings rank among the most complex for they must serve multitudes on a myriad of differing service levels. Certainly the demands made upon them span an incredible spectrum. At one and the same time they act as storehouse and answer-desk, classroom and scholarly study, clerical office and meeting place, distribution point and archive. They are a terminus for many intellectual searches, a bridge for others. They must interact and interconnect. They are as central in purpose as the hub of a wheel and just as constantly in operation.

These, of course, are visible attributes. A great university library has also and primarily a spirit of its own. It is in essence an immense accumulation of thought and ideas, its character and value shaped by those who build it and by those who draw upon it.

Above all else, a university library is a product of patient application. Time for its creation must of necessity stretch over literal decades. A library building and its collections are meant to endure, yet they must also face an unpredictable and fast-changing future. The library planner must accordingly largely focus on tomorrow and beyond tomorrow. Librarians and architects working together on such a building must somehow plot answers for questions and needs yet unexpressed. While planners of university library buildings may not quite face the unknown seas of the 15th century sailor, they must inescapably plot a course for destinations that are unique and unusual and, in some instances, uninvented.

In 1978/79 the Iowa State University Library embarked on just this sort of new direction with a major project of building expansion and improvement. A top building priority of the University and the State Board of Regents, to be financed and built in two phases, the project provided for first an addition and then in a second phase remodeling of the existing building. In May 1979 the state legislature of Iowa gave its support to these concepts when it approved an \$8.1 million capital appropriation for the first phase of building expansion — the ISU Library Addition.

Some fifty-four years earlier the first separate Library building at Iowa State had been completed for occupancy. Prior to that time Library facilities for what was then Iowa State College had been housed, in turn, in three different locations. The first distinct Library separate building was designed in the fixed-function style of the period to serve what was then an enrollment of less than 3,800 students. Four decades later two building expansions occurred, the first in 1961, the second in 1969, by which time the student body to be served had grown to five times that earlier enrollment figure. Iowa State's enrollment is today even higher at nearly 23,500, with the University continuing to attract the largest proportion of undergraduate students in the state.

In 1968, the University had taken as one of its most important goals the further development of the Library's holdings and services. Outstanding and systematic assistance in the years that followed was provided by the University administration toward this goal. With the 1973-1975 biennium, the continuing need for collection growth was further uniquely recognized by the State of Iowa through a substantial appropriation for acquisitions.

Over the decade of the 1970's Iowa State University grew and diversified tremendously. During the same years the Library's collections doubled and its services expanded to meet the growing requirements of students and faculty. By the decade's end, research and teaching demands, increased collections and a much larger student body and faculty were all straining Library facilities far beyond their physical capacity.

Obviously then, the \$8.1 million appropriation became the climactic event of the Library year 1978/79. Equally important were the events that led to initiation of the project. Under increasingly urgent discussion for a number of years, the need for library expansion was given final focus by a series of significant actions that began in September 1978 and which reached the first stage of fulfillment with state approval in May 1979.

Credit for providing crucial impetus to the project's successful initiation belongs to Iowa State University President W. Robert Parks. His staff convocation address which opened the 1978/79 academic year gave special attention to the Library and its long-standing space dilemma.

"It is my firm belief," he said "that the course of the future development of the Iowa State University, as one of the major teaching-research universities of the nation, will be fundamentally affected by the growth of excellence of our University Library."

Parks described the severe physical overcrowding of the Library as gravely affecting this progress. "The most overriding need," he said, "for a new building on the Iowa State campus, a need so critically urgent that it must be of serious concern to our entire academic community, is the necessity for constructing a major, modern addition to the University Library."

President Parks' call to action for an expanded Library building was almost immediately matched by a landmark decision made by the Iowa State University Foundation. The ISU Foundation, deeply committed to University improvement and serving as its fund-raising arm, agreed to provide private funds for the architects' fees and services involved in the design phase of the expansion. At the same time the Foundation also launched a \$4,000,000 campaign for voluntary contributions to supplement the planning, equipping and construction of the Addition and to provide assistance in the Library's continuing development.

Planning funds for state buildings are normally received through legislative appropriation. In this case the Foundation's magnificent and unusual action enabled the University to select and hire an architectural firm to begin at once to work on the Library Addition. This generous and laudable action was to save months of delay for the project.



The student body of Iowa State had already embarked on giving major financial support to the Library. The Class of 1978 dedicated their Senior Challenge Gift to provide a music and spoken word collection of recordings and to assist construction of listening rooms within the new Library Addition. Now the Class of 1979 came forward, dedicating part of their Senior Gift toward group study rooms in the new building. This marvelous and substantial support by Iowa State's students themselves was deeply appreciated, and their contributions will be given lasting recognition in the Addition.

While these events were occurring, the Library was reviewing its building program and together with the University architects revising it to meet the latest projected budget. Meetings were renewed with staff first for tentative furnishing and equipment needs, then with joint groups to consider and propose creative new methods of operation for which library building expansion would provide special opportunity.

The selection of architects began with many firms demonstrating interest. After careful consideration, two Des Moines firms were selected. They would join in the intensified effort to speed plans for the proposed addition and for remodeling the existing building.

Charles Herbert and Associates and Brooks, Borg and Skiles were chosen to work jointly on the design and other architectural services. The Herbert firm was also architect for the University's new College of Design, and Brooks, Borg and Skiles had served as architect for the two previous library additions.

An additional important step was also taken. A skilled and well-known library building consultant, Donald O. Rod, was appointed to join his talents to those of the growing library design team.

The start of the new year saw a host of preliminary activities underway. The initial design meetings concentrated on examination of the present facilities, establishing priorities and setting up schedules for visits to other libraries. Included were architectural tours of Iowa State's sister institutions, the libraries of the University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa. Both gave generously and graciously of their staff time and offered candid and helpful analyses of their attractive buildings, both of which had also been expanded and remodeled in recent years.

Next in line was the graphic analysis of the Library's building program itself. The architects had painstakingly reviewed requirements for collections, services and operations, illustrating these in large-scale graphics and charts. A valuable product at this step was a remarkably helpful and illustrative color-coded depiction representing the program's comparative square footage needs, contemplated traffic demands and the levels of access needed for service and collections. In long productive sessions that were to become a trademark of the design phase these analyses were reviewed, corrected and further priorities pinpointed.

This phase was also accompanied by a month of detailed personal inspections by the architectural team of all of the Library's functional areas. Relationships, work-flow and organizational continuity were described and outlined. Each division and department of the Library was given its own focus, with department and area heads and assistant directors providing full presentations of their operations, specifying the problems they faced and what new arrangements would be required. It was a time of thorough involvement with staff and architects interacting, probing and creating. Everyone, in effect, was "going back to school", and staff often commented in commiseration for the architects' learning task. Incredibly, despite immersion in a flood of library jargon and details, the design team absorbed, digested and placed the Library's operating needs in architectural perspective.

As the weeks flashed by, work continued in diagramming functional relationships. Under discussion and preparation as well were detailed inter-sectional and departmental relationships. Based on staff response, the design team undertook further study of the external site to develop overview concepts which would respond to all of the conditions examined to date. The demanding logistical farrago of locations, entrances, loading dock, access and connectors to the present structure became a mixture swirling ever more rapidly with each passing day.

Signally important to this entire process were the development of preferred locations for primary services. A special study of this was done by the Library, exploring the necessities, examining alternatives and establishing workable solutions. Such matters as future electronic installation needs were reviewed and incorporated, ranging from computer terminals to video and cable television. Compromise was an essential ingredient – even an expanded building has finite space limitations – and equally useful innovation flourished. Here the staff was superb, flexible in understanding and all agreeing on one ultimate purpose: the total success of the building.

By mid-April the site analysis was ready. Vehicular and pedestrian access was identified. Existing utilities had been studied and a photo survey made of the present structure's exterior and views. The surrounding campus buildings, malls, streets, and the special beauty of the central Iowa State "green space" were all to be utilized to best advantage.

Now the architects presented the first four building schemes. While every building in its initial stages is often visualized several ways, the variety and number of schematics provided by the design team were extraordinary. The Library staff became convinced that the lights burned just as late in the Des Moines offices of the architects as they did in those of the Library planners on campus. The array of potential building schemes was a splendid assist as the design slowly began to assume its final and most useful form.

Early in May the architects provided four further schemes. Podiums and plazas, connecting links between the new and old portions of the building, and the gradual introduction of an attractive atrium were all part of the warp and woof of the process. Further on-site visits to new buildings other than libraries served to help identify or illustrate internal traffic techniques, soundproofing, "open office landscaping", and service area designs.



Here it must also be noted that the project's most complex architectural challenge was beginning to be met and mastered. A new and separate library is one thing, a major addition to an older classic structure is quite another. Neither is simple; the second, however, bears the added conundrums of how well will the floors merge, how high can the ceilings be, can the stateliness of an older building be treated respectfully and still blend into the architectural whole – not just successfully, but outstandingly? The developing solutions that were emerging in this period of the building's gestation were obviously pointing toward an excellent and dramatic series of answers.

As the planning year drew to a close, it was clear that the intense, exhausting but fascinating efforts of the preceding months were paying off. Time had been eclipsed, a schematic entity was now ready for internal refinements. The Library staff, the University's architectural, space and physical plant representatives, and the design team were each and all becoming intimately aware of the actual need and the exciting probable achievement they were fabricating together. There was mutual respect and understanding, and the utilization of such a planning process while arduous and demanding made the final inevitable compromises workable and worthwhile. The usual anxieties and frustrations that are always linked with any complex building were instead replaced with a fruitful and thoroughly satisfying experience.

Then in May 1979 came the capping achievement of the year. In the final hours of the 68th session of the Iowa General Assembly the \$8.1 million appropriation was approved for the ISU Library Addition. It would cover construction of Phase One of the Library's program of building expansion, providing an addition of approximately 95,000 gross square feet. Phase Two was still understood to be a Regential priority and would cover the remodeling of the existing building and, importantly, the proper merging of the two structures into one.

Thus the combined efforts of so many coalesced into a result that would within a few short years bring about an entirely new Library environment for the students and faculty of Iowa State University.

The foregoing, of course, can express but a brief glimpse of the year's work. It cannot fully describe the dedicated efforts of the ISU Foundation and the countless individuals – alumni, faculty, students and friends – who gave and are continuing to give the generous financial support that made such advance planning possible, voluntary and heartwarming gifts that painted in the most dramatic way the determination of the Iowa State family to bring about an improved and enlarged Library. It can express but a part of the gratitude of the Library for the University administration's leadership and outstanding assistance given to the project, and for the State Board of Regents' support on behalf of this urgent capital need. It can reveal only in passing the willingness and unstinting labors of the design team, from Charles Herbert and Joseph Borg and their associates, to the University architect, the building consultant and representatives of the Office of Space and Schedules, the Physical Plant and other campus offices. Nor can these few pages fully describe the commendations that come from the Dean of Library Services to those Library faculty and staff who so admirably contributed to all that transpired in this first planning year.

The end of the Library expansion project still lies ahead. Design development, final drawings, the bid process and construction are yet to come. Unknown economic conditions may pose delays. Yet in this year the project came alive. While expressing appreciation is more often associated with a journey's end than its beginning, in this case 1978/79 did mark an end to waiting and the first major steps of a new beginning. Iowa State's Library expansion is underway, and for this the most special thanks are paid to each and all.

In the words of President Parks: "Together - we can achieve the kind of distinguished Library which is commensurate with the breadth and stature of the Iowa State University."

The events of 1978/79 give resounding evidence for that belief.