

# The Charles B. Phillips Library— An Adventure in Planning

BY ETHEL W. TAPPER

A NEW LIBRARY is, first of all, an adventure in planning. For any library, planning is necessary to achieve both functional efficiency and esthetic unity. This is especially true for a small college since funds are so limited that such a college is seldom able to correct major mistakes if planning has been neglected.

An adventure in planning began for Aurora College with the conviction on the part of the staff that the task of the library is to foster the association of students and teachers, individually and together, with books. In a small church-related college where the fellowship of students and teachers is cherished, a contagious enthusiasm for learning can be shared directly and naturally in the midst of books. The library is uniquely the intellectual center of a liberal arts college since the students and teachers of all departments must seek its resources. As the library reveals man's heritage of ideas and gives insight into the close relationships among the fields of knowledge, it extends scholarship beyond the classroom.

Because Aurora College believes in the central significance of the library, much thought was given to planning its recently dedicated library building. An early step was the appointment of an Advisory Committee on Library Building in May 1958. This committee included representatives of the faculty, the administration, and the library staff. Its task was to study in detail the purposes and functions a library building for Aurora College should serve.

The members of this committee read widely about college library buildings

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and visited a number of new structures. After meeting frequently throughout a year and clarifying in discussion their convictions about the library, the members of the committee released a twenty-page "program" report.

In preparing the report the committee had reviewed the objectives of this particular college, the characteristics of its student body, and the curriculum it provided. Clearly the demand was for an undergraduate library supporting general education and the undergraduate majors of the various departments.

The report analyzed in some detail the different constituencies to be served in varying degrees and the services to be rendered to each group. It appeared that serving two groups of ten considered, namely, the regular student group and the faculty group, constituted the major task of the library and that if these two groups were served well most of the justified service to the other eight would have been provided.

Anticipating the probable growth of enrollment and of the book collection, the committee estimated the space that would be needed for readers, book collection, and technical services in the next twenty years. At this point no attempt was made to determine the number or layout of floors except that certain principles were adopted as a guide for the architect:

1. The basic principle set forth was the free association of students and faculty with books through the intermin-

gling of books and reader areas. Because both the number of students in the college and the number of volumes in its library will be limited, the library can be organized so that each student or teacher can have easy access to the books and related materials.

2. A second principle called for the provision of a variety of accommodations to care for the different ways in which readers may wish to use the wide range of materials available. The student should have encouragement through both facilities and materials to study independently.

3. Not only must an effective and distinctive building be functionally adequate but it must also give esthetic satisfaction. Therefore a library must be attractive, not in the sense of a monument to be contemplated from without, but in the evidence of an unspoken invitation to enter. The appeal to reading must be specifically evident as soon as a person enters the building. At the same time the reader has been given close association with books he must find in the building the release offered by a sense of relative spaciousness.

4. The building must have the practical provisions of fire resistance and sound absorption.

5. It must be planned for economy in terms of operating staff and of maintenance.

6. The building must have reasonable flexibility to permit changes that may become desirable functionally, and must allow for expansion if and when that should become necessary.

After defining these principles, the committee offered some suggestions concerning the desired space relationships among certain functions such as the card catalog, the order department, the catalog department, the circulation desk, etc. The functions to be grouped on the main floor were defined. Consideration was also given to areas which might,

without reducing functional or esthetic values, serve multiple purposes.

Student representatives interested in the project also visited other libraries and contributed helpful suggestions for the consideration of the planning committee. Significant help for the general problems of library building came to the librarian from attendance at the Library Building institutes of the ALA. Especially valuable was the counsel of Ralph W. Tyler, consultant in higher education, and Keyes D. Metcalf, consultant in planning for all aspects of the functional design of the building. The opportunity to have such authoritative help has resulted in a building that is educationally effective in both purpose and practical aspects. The value of such wise and experienced consultants cannot be overestimated.

The architect translated the principles set forth by the committee into blueprints which were studied and modified until it seemed that the planning requirements had been adequately met.

After the architect had actually begun to design the floor plans, the development of a three-dimensional scale model of the proposed interior layout proved exceedingly useful in checking the planning at specific points and in interpreting the plans to the board of directors, students, faculty, and visitors.

Modification in detail of the layout continued steadily as the architect worked. Only after the architect's plans had met satisfactorily the functional needs of the interior was attention concentrated on the exterior design.

The site chosen for the library is near two other major academic buildings and provides space for expansion. (There is room to the north for additional modules.) An added advantage of the location is that it permitted a building design maximizing the use of north light for both readers and technical staff.

The library with two floors and partial

basement has approximately twenty-seven thousand square feet of floor space. The building is of simple rectangular design with the long axis of the building running east and west. The one public entrance, off-center on the south, is oriented toward the major academic buildings. The exterior is of warm-toned red ceramic tile with white concrete columns at regular intervals. Economy was secured through modular construction of reinforced concrete. The building is planned to sustain the weight of books at any location and since there are few interior walls the arrangements are flexible. The building footings were so put in place that the partial basement can be completed if desired. A virtue of the modular plan is its flexibility, which allows some change at a later date. Nevertheless, it seemed desirable to plan as carefully as possible, as if major changes were not likely in the future.

The building is heated by a system of hot water circulating through convectors at the perimeter-wall of the building. The source of heat is a gas-fired boiler. Duct space has been provided for air conditioning at a later date. Several surface textures have been used in the interior. Floors are covered with vinyl tile and ceilings with acoustic tile. Careful choice of colors for floors, walls, stacks, and furniture gives a sense of light and beauty, inviting students to enter. Maximum use has been made of daylight. The windows begin at desk height. Vertical blinds control the admission of sunlight. In themselves, the blinds are a significant element both in the exterior appearance of the building and in interior decoration. In tone, they match the exterior ceramic tile; in the interior, they provide quietly warm color in the window areas. Artificial light is of the fluorescent type.

Immediately upon entering the building, one is aware of books, some within the foyer and many others immediately beyond the surrounding glass partition.

Through the partition one also sees the gracefully curved balcony by which the second floor is cut back from the front windows. A luminous ceiling over this two-story area dramatically reveals a cross section of the library with its book resources close at hand for readers. Below the balcony, reading areas are divided by low shelving into the semblance of alcoves. This accomplishes a sense of intimacy with books at the same time that the smaller areas actually flow together to unify and give the whole area a feeling of spaciousness.

Throughout the whole library, book and reader areas are freely intermingled, and traffic patterns are such that readers may reach book areas directly or may enter study areas without disturbing other readers. The width of each aisle was determined by the proportion of traffic it is expected to bear. There are stairways at either end of the building, and there is an elevator for the use of staff and physically handicapped persons.

Allocation of space on the first floor was closely scrutinized. Just beyond the entrance lobby and at the junction of all paths leading to the entrance is the center of public service, an area combining the card catalog, the circulation desk, and the open reserve shelves. (The use of reserve shelves is somewhat limited since, so far as is practical, students are encouraged to explore the resources of the stacks.) This center of public service is placed between the area of technical service and library office and the public area for reader use. The glass partitions dividing these areas from each other keep a sense of openness in the building and make for economical use of staff in general supervision.

The collection of general reference books, periodical indexes, and vertical files are easily accessible in the center section of the main floor. The use of reference shelving 60 inches rather than 90 inches high contributes to a sense of openness. Surrounding the reference

shelves are a variety of reader accommodations. Nearby are shelves for current periodicals and a pleasant area for the use of audio-visual materials by individuals. Sections of stacks adjoin the reader areas, and there are carrels beside the windows surrounding the stacks.

Accommodations were planned to care for the different ways in which readers might wish to use the variety of materials available. There are many individual study desks (carrels), a considerable number of informal chairs, and a few conventional table arrangements. There are special study rooms for the use of small groups and several seminar rooms, all of which are equipped with blackboards. There are also typing rooms, and rooms for rare books, college archives, and a research collection of religious materials. Practical needs are met by such areas as a coat room, a staff room, and a kitchenette.

The basement has an area for mending and binding activities, shelving for the temporary storage and sorting of collections of gift books, and stacks for several thousand of the less frequently used titles.

Certain rooms have been set aside for special purposes. One large room is available for informal literary events and for the formal meetings of faculty and the board of directors. Since the college is concerned with Christian values, a small chapel for individual meditation was included.

Aurora College, like most small colleges, needs flexible space in which to meet certain occasional needs of the whole institution. Already, without hindrance to library service, the new building has demonstrated its value for certain other purposes. The library provided a gracious setting for the reception at the time of the inauguration of the president. The general and varied facilities of the library made an educational contribution to such occasions as Parents' Night, a meeting for educa-

tional counselors in connection with a Careers Conference, and meetings of community literary groups. Some of these functions occurred during regular library hours while the regular activities of the library went forward concurrently and without interruption.

Deliberate care was given to the furnishings and equipment. Wood was chosen as most appropriate for the card catalog, charging desk, CBI and index tables, atlas cases, and catalog consultation tables. The finish is a color between fruitwood and walnut, and harmonizes with the birch trim of the building. Attention was given to a surface for the charging desk that should be durable, attractive, quiet, and nonglossy. After careful preliminary study the charging desk was built 42 inches high.

Steel was chosen for tables, chairs, and carrels. Before this decision was reached it was ascertained that the surfaces did not seriously reflect either sound or light and that chairs and tables were not noisy when they touched each other. A design of chair was chosen so that the backs would not rub against walls or other pieces of furniture. Because carrels were planned for maximum use rather than individual assignment, a type of carrel was designed without shelves or drawers which might encourage "squatters' rights." In many locations, near the north windows for example, the carrels have only three-inch backstops at the edge of the desk tops. Others of the carrels have twenty-inch backs to maintain shields between carrel users opposite each other. (Attendance records show that carrels are the favorite accommodation for students. Both types are used consistently.)

There are a few tables, each accommodating only four students. The size of the table top is 6 feet by 4 feet, allowing a 3-by-2-foot area for each user, or the same amount as the surface of an individual carrel.

A pleasing, "non-institutional" grey-

green is the basic color unifying the library. This gray-green color occurs in the frames of the tables, chairs, and carrels and is carefully matched in the shelving. On the furniture it harmonizes with the somewhat deeper green used in the module columns of the building and is a pleasant contrast to the vertical blinds. The carrel and table tops are a very light green textolite. (The textolite is cushioned below to absorb sound.) The upholstery of the chairs uses brighter accents such as tangerine, gold, and persimmon as well as deeper greens. The more striking colors were kept to the items which could be changed in location if desired.

The building is equipped for approximately one hundred thousand volumes (or slightly more than double the present holdings) and has a seating capacity of 250 plus the capacity of the seminar and special rooms. (The seating provided is for one-third of the day student registration estimated for ten years hence.)

The cost of the building was \$500,000 and of the furnishings and equipment \$80,000. The magnificent gift of one-half million dollars for the building was given by Charles B. Phillips, a citizen of Aurora who in his ninety-third year shared in the dedication of the building.

On an overcast Friday morning in May 1962 a good-natured company of some three hundred students, teachers, administrators, office secretaries, janitors,

and dormitory housemothers, carrying armloads of books, moved in a vigorous line from the old library quarters to the new. They gaily made the circuit again and again, and in little more than three hours transferred some forty thousand volumes to their proper locations in the new library building. The next Monday afternoon library service was resumed, and the following Saturday the building was dedicated. In those nine days the climactic chapter to the long story of planning the building was written swiftly.

The time since has been too short for anything but a tentative appraisal of trends in the usage of the library. All facilities and services of the building have been used in varying degrees and with satisfying results. There are marked gains both in student use of the library facilities and in external circulation. There is a definite increase in the use of such special equipment as the audiovisual provisions. The reaction of the day-by-day users—the faculty and students—is even more enthusiastic than their spirit on the day they moved the books.

In such a favorable situation, it is now desirable and necessary to engage in planning two kinds of sustained development which must take place concurrently: (1) the strengthening of the collection and (2) the increasing of the effective use by both students and faculty of the available library resources. ■■