

Planning the Tennessee State Library and Archives Building .

By DAN M. ROBISON¹

Tennessee State Library and Archives

WHEN I asked one of the program committee to justify a paper on the Tennessee State Library and Archives Building, which you will presently examine, he gave a surprising answer. Some members of his committee, he stated, desired especially to know how it came about that an archivist had a rather large share in planning and directing the construction of a building intended to house archives. It would appear that such a thing is rare enough to stir the curiosity of at least a few members of our Society.

No building of this character is likely to be constructed with public funds until the need is great enough to impress seriously those public officials responsible for spending taxpayers' money. And we must remember that the demands upon them are many, insistent, and often backed by substantial popular interest. Unfortunately, archivists as a rule are not good enough at public relations to arouse an electorate, many of whom are not certain whether archives has to do with architecture or archeology. Certainly the need for such a building in Tennessee became very great before any effective action was taken.

More than 50 years ago our State Librarian included in her biennial report a recommendation that her agency "join in the movement of the Tennessee Historical Society to secure the passage of a Bill creating the Department of History and Archives and securing an appropriation for a handsome building to include the State Library, the Department of History and the Tennessee Historical Society."

Fifteen years later the State Library and the Archives were combined under the direction of the late John Trotwood Moore, the first to hold the title State Librarian and Archivist. By then there was a strong movement for a multipurpose building, to be a memorial to the veterans of World War I. With no prospects of getting a separate building for his department, Moore advocated the Me-

¹ The author, State Librarian and Archivist of Tennessee, read this paper at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, on October 10, 1955, at Nashville, Tennessee.

morial Building on condition that it include space for the Archives. This was done and the building was dedicated in 1925. By 1929, however, writing in the *Knoxville Journal* only a few months before his death, Moore described the new Archives quarters and added: "But even that is inadequate to take care of all the Archives and sooner or later another building or room will have to be built for them."

Two developments during the 1920's had still further intensified the need for space. The legislature had created the Tennessee Historical Commission, had designated the State Librarian as its chairman, and had directed him to provide space for it in the State Library. Later, the legislature entered into an agreement with the Tennessee Historical Society, a private corporation, whereby the State Library and Archives would "take, hold and administer in trust" the society's "collection of books, relics, newspapers, portraits and manuscripts."

In 1929 Mrs. John Trotwood Moore, my predecessor, succeeded her husband as State Librarian and Archivist, and during the 20 years of her administration books and records came in at a greatly accelerated rate. The quarters for both the Library and the Archives become so crowded that efficient operation was out of the question. Indeed, by the fall of 1952 there arose grave doubts as to the safety of the Capitol, and a structural engineer was called in to make a study. He estimated the excess load of books and records stored there to be at least 250 tons. After he had set up a strict plan for removing material so as not to upset the balance established through long years, we were ordered to store the excess load in the new building 6 months before it was completed. In addition to all this, our holdings filled all available space in other State buildings, including attics, basements, and corridors, and we had stored some material in two university libraries of the city.

The foregoing sketch not only shows the long-developing and increasing need for a new building but explains why it was necessary to provide, in the building, space for the State Library, the Archives, the Tennessee Historical Society, and the Tennessee Historical Commission.

Mrs. Moore began her administration on the eve of the great depression. As times improved, however, and the finances of the State became better ordered, she began to work for a new building. Matters progressed so far that early in December 1941 Gov. Prentice Cooper urged the Historical Commission to make a new State Library and Archives Building its main objective and promised to

use his influence at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly to secure the necessary funds. A few days later the attack on Pearl Harbor brought this movement to a halt.

When the war was over, Mrs. Moore renewed her efforts, and during 1946 she enlisted the support of some 40 State-wide women's organizations. She also had the support of a number of State officials, especially Gov. Jim McCord. As a result, the General Assembly of 1947 authorized a bond issue of \$1,500,000 for a State library and archives building, to be "a lasting memorial to the citizens of Tennessee who served in World War II."

It soon became apparent that the amount authorized was not enough to construct a building adequate to the needs. Therefore, the assembly of 1949, with the support of Gov. Gordon Browning, empowered the Governor to allocate from the State's sinking fund an amount necessary to construct this and the State office building that also had been provided for in the 1947 act. From this source, Governor Browning allocated \$1,000,000 to the State Library and Archives project, thereby making available \$2,500,000 to construct, equip, and furnish the building.

Costs continued to rise and the State's building program required additional bond issues. These were authorized by an act of 1951, signed by Governor Browning, and another of 1953, signed by Gov. Frank G. Clement. Both acts authorized unspecified amounts to be used to complete the State Library and Archives Building. Happily, it was not necessary to apply for funds from the two later bond issues. The building was completed, equipped, and furnished; and there remains a small balance from the \$2,500,000 provided in the acts of 1947 and 1949.

Let us now return to the question that prompted this paper — how did it happen that the Archivist had a major part in planning the building? In seeking the answer, we must remember that for nearly a half century my predecessors had worked for the cause, faithfully and against great odds. The four governors whom I have mentioned saw the need and gave support, and four succeeding general assemblies appropriated funds. As stated before, numerous organizations and citizens aided in bringing matters to a head. All this tended to free this building project from the demands of politics so often attached to public works.

Granting all this, however, and with every disposition to give full credit to all concerned, it is my considered opinion that one person above any other individual or organization influenced the policies adopted with respect to this building, including that of giving the

Archivist a voice. I have consciously refrained from mentioning his name up to now.

Roy Hood Beeler was attorney general and court reporter for Tennessee from 1932 until his untimely death on September 23, 1954. Elected to his office for 8-year terms by members of the State supreme court, he was singularly free from the pressures which so often play upon public officials. He was gifted with a personality that won him friends in every part of the State and with a mind that was quick to see through intricate problems. He displayed sound judgment based upon common sense, understanding, a sense of fairness, and a healthy sense of humor. Added to these qualities were a broad vision of the public good, an integrity that was never questioned, and a forthrightness that never left a doubt as to where he stood. And so as the years went by, "the General," as he was affectionately called by so many, came to be very much of an institution in Tennessee. Successive governors sought and respected his views not only on legal questions but on matters of policy as well. In the sessions of the legislature, members of all parties and factions counseled with him and relied upon him or his office to write their bills.

A graduate of Maryville College in East Tennessee and of the University of Chicago Law School, General Beeler was also a lover of books. In addition to his professional works, his private library at the time of his death numbered more than 3,500 volumes. That collection testified to a broad reading interest. While it was weighted heavily with history, biography, and works on government, it contained a considerable body of fiction, of essays and poetry, of works on philosophy and religion.

It was inevitable that this man would be a stout friend of the State Library and Archives. He gave quiet but effective support to Mrs. Moore in her long campaign to secure the first appropriation, and he had a great deal to do with getting subsequent appropriations. It was General Beeler who wrote the act of 1947, which placed the project in the hands of the Library Building Commission, consisting of the Governor as chairman, the State Librarian and Archivist as secretary, and the attorney general as the third member. He had most to do with the selection of the site, for he had long dreamed of the Library and Archives standing beside his beloved Supreme Court Building. It was he who selected the architect, about whom more will be said later. All this is not to imply that he disregarded others who held responsibility with him, for he did not. The others, however, respected his views because of his good sense,

his well known interest in the subject, his long and constructive thinking on its problems, and his determination that not a dollar would be spent unwisely if that could be prevented.

Selection of the architect was the first major problem confronting the building commission, and I am informed that General Beeler was given that responsibility by the other members. He looked for the architect with the greatest and most successful experience in library building, and settled upon the Nashville firm of Hibbs, Parrent, and Hall. The two senior members of this firm earlier had designed and supervised construction of five large university and college libraries. Two of these buildings were located in Nashville and the others in the States of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Oklahoma. Upon the death in early 1949 of the senior member, Henry C. Hibbs, and the subsequent dissolution of the firm, H. Clinton Parrent was named architect for the building. It is he who designed the present structure. Without his ability and long experience in library building, I fear that the ideas of a newly created archivist would have been all too inadequate.

In the meantime, the architect and members of the building commission held consultations with A. F. Kuhlman, director of the Joint University Libraries here in Nashville, who had collaborated in the planning of the large building housing that institution and of other college and university libraries in the South. Dr. Kuhlman later submitted a valuable preliminary statement, "The Requirements of the Tennessee State Archives and Library Building." About that time Mrs. John Trotwood Moore retired after 30 years of service, and the Governor named her State Librarian and Archivist Emeritus.

Such had been the developments by late 1949 when I was appointed to my present office. Few persons, I believe, have found themselves suddenly placed in a situation with so many favorable conditions, none of which were of their own doing. In brief, the handsome sum of \$2,500,000 had been provided; a site with ample room for future expansion had been agreed upon tentatively; the architect, already selected, was a man of ability and exceptional experience for the job at hand and, very important, a man of integrity and engaging personality; and a preliminary study of building needs had been made by a highly competent consultant.

Last but by no means least, the undertaking was in the hands of a building commission with ample powers, the other two members of which were not only interested and cooperative but were unfailingly cordial and considerate. There was general agreement that

no considerations were to have weight that did not contribute directly to securing the best building possible for the money at hand. Through the years of planning and construction, no decision was ever reached without the full and free consent of the State Librarian and Archivist. When, therefore, you find mistakes of judgment as you go through our building, please know that I have neither the right nor the desire to shift the blame to others.

So much as to how I came to have a voice in planning and constructing the building. You might be interested in a brief statement of how I undertook to meet this responsibility when I had become State Librarian and Archivist with no experience either in planning buildings or in the administration of libraries or archives. I might explain that the appointment had been made because of several years of experience in using the Tennessee State Library and Archives in my own research, in directing the research of others, and in editing the *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*.

The first assignment given me was to make a study of the problems involved in planning such a structure, including visits to library and archives buildings that seemed likely to offer the best lessons afforded by the experience of others. The first few months were given to sources of information available in Nashville, which included published materials, the more recently constructed library buildings in the city, and frequent discussions with the architect, the other members of the building commission, and still other interested and informed individuals. Thereafter, I visited the State libraries or the Archives, or a combination of the two, in Georgia, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Indiana, and Illinois. Visits were also made to Harvey S. Firestone Memorial Library at Princeton University, the National Archives, and the Library of Congress. Several of our neighboring States have excellent new buildings for their Departments of Archives and History, which we did not visit for the reason that they included museum facilities that we did not plan to incorporate here.

Finding the buildings as well as the organizations in Virginia, Indiana, and Illinois to be most nearly like what was contemplated for Tennessee, I made return visits to each of those States, this time in company with General Beeler, Mr. Parrent, and the latter's consulting mechanical engineer, I. C. Thomasson. In all places visited, those in charge as well as members of their staffs were uniformly hospitable and willing to give every bit of information possible.

In the meantime the Tennessee Library Association, acting

through its executive and planning committees, showed every disposition to help. These groups named a special committee to advise in planning, to the end that the new building should be well suited to its purposes.

The architect, from his long experience, had learned the importance of planning so as to best accommodate the work to be done. He therefore refused to draw any plans until he had a full statement of the work to be carried on in the building, the proper sequence of that work, and the approximate space required for each operation. This wise stand on his part insured against a complaint too often heard among archivists and librarians, that their buildings were designed without consultation with those who were to use them.

The required statement was presented and approved by the building commission on April 6, 1950, under the title "A Report on the Program and Building Requirements of the Tennessee State Library and Archives." During the several months of its preparation, there were frequent consultations with the parties mentioned above as well as with Mrs. Moore; Robert T. Quarles, Jr., director of our Archives Division; Isabel Howell, director of our State Library Division; and Martha Parks, to be director of our Public Libraries Division.

The building commission took an important step at that time when it authorized its secretary, "acting in consultation with the architect, . . . to employ such consultants as might seem necessary to the proper planning of the building." We were fortunate to obtain as our local consultant A. F. Kuhlman and as associate consultants Randolph Church, State Librarian of Virginia, and Margaret Norton, State Archivist of Illinois, both of whom had had much to do with planning the splendid buildings of their respective States. With such consultants we could go ahead with greater confidence.

Some 2 months after receiving the report on the program and building requirements, Mr. Parrent had drawn his preliminary plans. It seems unnecessary to describe here the many discussions held during the months that followed, in all of which the architect showed the greatest desire to make the building conform to the demands of effective operation. It is enough to say that the preliminary plans were studied in great detail by members of the building commission, our consultants, and members of the staff and that quite a few modifications resulted. Though it was impossible to comply with every idea of each individual, we reached substantial agree-

ment on most points, so that after some 15 months of study and planning, the building commission approved final plans and specifications on January 19, 1951. I might say that during construction we made only a few minor changes in the specifications submitted by the architect at that time.

The period of construction, though longer than that of planning, held few problems to be discussed here. Bids were opened on February 27, 1951, and soon thereafter the commission awarded a contract to the Rock City Construction Co. of Nashville in the sum of \$2,145,000. This amount included not only the building itself but such equipment as reference desks and catalog cases, shelving and filing cases for the stack and vault areas, the Barrow Laminator, and the fumigator and cleaning table. Nine change orders modifying the original contract added a net total of \$104,672. These included some alterations of the original plans but for the most part consisted of additional facilities which we had not anticipated or which we kept back until we could determine how our money was holding out. Let me say here that the Rock City Co., which had constructed the Supreme Court Building some 15 years earlier, proved to be dependable and cooperative all the way through, so that problems arising during construction were readily solved.

In addition to the main contract, there were 10 others to include such major items as furniture and furnishings, all kinds of office equipment, photographic and projection equipment, and an offset press. These 10 contracts totaled \$94,981. Other requisitions for small items need not be described. All in all, the total expenditures fell a few thousand dollars short of the \$2,500,000 allocated at the beginning.

There were certain architectural problems that might be mentioned here.

Because of its location, the height of the building was restricted so that it should not obstruct a view of the Capitol or overtop the Supreme Court Building next door. Therefore, no provision was made for expansion upward. Instead, the area back of us has been reserved for future expansion; this, because of the sharp slope of the hill, will afford the addition of considerably more floor space than the present structure has.

Since the legislature had designated this as a memorial building, it was agreed that those portions open to the public should be appropriate to that purpose. The exterior should be in harmony with both the Capitol and the Supreme Court Building. As for the

interior, it was agreed to conserve space as much as possible and to get a monumental effect through finishings and appointments.

The storage and working areas to the rear, to which the public does not have access, are strictly functional. There has been some criticism of the fact that this portion was finished in brick rather than stone. Both the building commission and the architect were aware of this contrast and gave serious thought to an alternate bid providing for stone. To have spent the \$159,000 necessary for this change, however, would have required sacrifices elsewhere that we were unwilling to make. Also, we anticipate that when expansion takes place the portion facing the street below will be finished in stone and will cut off the view of the storage areas between.

Our major problem in planning might be said to have fallen into two parts. First, looking to future needs, we proposed to get the greatest space, properly built and equipped, that our money would buy. The best we could do was a building which has some 112,000 square feet of floor space. This figure roughly breaks down as follows:

Storage areas	81,000 sq. ft.
Work areas	27,000 sq. ft.
Equipment room	3,000 sq. ft.
Receiving room	1,000 sq. ft.

With this space, we estimate our construction cost to be something less than \$20 per square foot or \$2 per cubic foot.

As to the second aspect of our major problem and again looking to the future, we were unable to foresee the relative increase of space requirements for the Library and the Archives. The architect answered this question by designing each portion so that it may be used interchangeably for either archives or library purposes. Mr. Parrent could explain the details of that far better than I, but it is enough to say that any part of the storage area can be adapted to any type of shelving needed or to the use of filing cases. On the seventh deck, you will find all types of storage facilities now in use, including six-drawer filing cases, three different kinds of shelving, and the different types of storage boxes.

Only this year a new type of record has appeared which may in the future require storage facilities somewhat different from those now in use. I refer to the disk recordings of the 1955 legislative sessions. We recorded not only all sessions of both houses but those committee meetings held in either chamber. Recently the Legislative Council Committee requested the Archives to record for our files all sessions of that committee and of its several subcommittees.

Up to now the problem of storing the recordings has not been a major one, but it may become more serious if recording activities continue to develop as they have this year. William T. Alderson has written a paper on our experience in this field.²

I should say that the top storage deck, designated for archives, was not equipped. For this there were three reasons. Our money did not allow it; we anticipated the need for large work spaces to prepare records for ultimate disposition; and, finally, we found that our archivist friends were not in agreement as to whether the shelving or filing-case method of storage was best. Since we had provided for both in the lower decks, we believed that our own experience would indicate the more suitable equipment when the need arose and money became available.

There are two features of this building which some of our consultants did not approve. In the first place, some believed that by extending our wings parallel to the street rather than by placing them alongside the storage area, we were sacrificing efficiency to appearance. We considered this view quite seriously before reaching a decision. Admitting that we were influenced by the matter of appearance and admitting further that construction cost might have been reduced by eliminating two walls, we were not convinced that the other plan would make for more efficient operation. Since the vault and stack areas are closed to the public, it seemed desirable to keep the entrances to those areas to the very minimum and to have them in plain view of staff members as they went about their regular duties. With one exception, I believe we have attained that objective. There were two other considerations that influenced our thinking on this point. By our present arrangement we were able to get our equipment and receiving rooms at comparatively small expense and thereby to save more costly space for operations more closely related to our main job. Then, too, the present arrangement allows for two wings to the storage area, parallel to the front wings, which otherwise would have been impossible.

The other feature to which some of our consultants objected is one which I have dreaded mentioning to members of the Society of American Archivists and have therefore put off as long as possible. You will, of course, notice that our Archives Division is located on the ground floor, which is not visible from the front of the building. One wall of this important area — you will naturally say *the* most important area — is without windows, but because of the sharp

² "Legislative Recording by the Tennessee Archives," in *American Archivist*, 19: 11-17 (Jan. 1956).

slope of the hill the two ends and the back walls have windows similar to those on the other two floors. Incidentally, the windows on all the floors seem to be of minor importance, so far as working conditions are concerned. They are not opened because of air-conditioning, and the staff members keep the Venetian blinds well drawn, seeming to prefer the excellent artificial light which Mr. Parrent has provided. One of our consultants in particular strongly objected to our arrangement. He believed that the Archives search and preparation rooms as well as the Library reading and work rooms should be on the first floor, more accessible to the public.

Although we recognized the desirability of such an arrangement, the only way to get it, without placing staff operations on different floors from search and reading rooms, seemed to require using two decks of the storage area for those purposes. The architect, on this point, was quite positive that the most economical and sturdy construction called for a solid storage area from the ground up, unbroken by other facilities. Our present arrangement seemed also to offer more economical operation, by having the most used materials of both divisions stored close to their respective search and preparation rooms, offices, and the public index or catalog files. The decision as to which division would occupy the ground floor was dictated largely by the relative number of people using each.

There is one arrangement in the Archives Division that we did not like at the planning stage and still do not like. The director's office is so placed that it does not have outside windows. We considered putting the office at the south end of the search room, but Mr. Quarles preferred the present location. He wanted to be near the center of operations, near the entrance to the vaults, and also close to the Land Office, whose records are used more frequently than any others in the Archives. The glass walls of this office allow the director to see what is going on and also lessen the chance of claustrophobia.

Throughout the time of planning and construction, the writer fondly hoped that the building would prove adequate for the next 50 years. Mr. Parrent warned that this was far too optimistic, but in spite of this, the awakening has been rude. We estimate that we moved into the building some 550 tons of records and books already in our possession. The records probably accounted for between 325 and 350 tons of this bulk. Since the move in June of 1953, we have received from the various State departments an estimated 270 tons of records. If this rate of intake continues, our building will be filled within 5 years. In the meantime this deluge

of records has made it difficult for our staff to keep house as they would like.

You will see at once, of course, that we have no records disposal or records management program. This, we hope, will be remedied at the next session of the General Assembly. The last assembly directed the Legislative Council Committee to make a study of the records problem with the view to appropriate legislation in 1957. Already a subcommittee of the council, including members of both senate and house, has given careful attention to this subject. Prospects are good that we will have a records disposal program under way within 2 years.

There are other features of the building that might be discussed if time allowed. As you look it over, undoubtedly you will have questions to ask. All of us, including Mr. Parrent, will answer them as best we can. There is no doubt that you, as professionals, will see many things that you would have had otherwise. If there be serious mistakes, do not put the blame upon the architect or upon politics or politicians. As stated before, the architect and the other two members of the building commission were careful to see that nothing was done without the approval of the Librarian and Archivist.

In concluding, may I refer to a paper read before the National Association of State Libraries a year before the building had been completed. After admitting that there was an element of luck in the good progress made, it went on to say:

Chiefly, however, it is due to the finest teamwork I have ever seen. Members of the Building Commission, the architect and his staff and consultants, the Library and Archives staff, the contractors and subcontractors, the superintendent, the foremen and subforemen, and the workmen, from the most skilled to the lowly "buggy rollers" — all have taken an interest and pride in the building. . . . My wish for you is this: if you ever build, may you be favored, as I, with a body of helpers, each of whom, be his part large or small, will look upon the building as in some degree a monument to his own efforts.

After 3 years to think it over, I would make the same wish for members of the Society of American Archivists.