

# The First Permanent Building of the Nigerian National Archives

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*National Archives of Nigeria*

ONE of the first tasks that engaged the attention of all concerned when the Nigerian National Archives was established as a department of state on April 1, 1954, was to plan the first permanent archive building at Ibadan, for which the Federal Government provided £51,000 in its First Economic Programme, 1955-60.<sup>1</sup> For this purpose, preliminary inquiries were made about the basic features and requirements of a modern archival building in the United States, Britain, and Southern Rhodesia. Some very valuable general information was furnished by the Public Record Office, London. The important fact revealed by these investigations, however, was that the proposed building would be the first of its type in Tropical Africa, and on that account its ultimate shape and structure would be determined by local considerations that European and North American architects had not encountered. In other words, the design of the building must be a work of research carried out on the spot by Nigerian architects and archivists.

This research was ultimately undertaken by A. M. D. Halliday of the Design Group Nigeria, a Nigerian firm of chartered architects, in cooperation with the professional staff of the Nigerian National Archives, and on January 9, 1959, the first permanent block of the National Archives of Nigeria was formally declared open.

## ESSENTIALS OF AN ARCHIVE BUILDING

The experience gained in this exercise has confirmed that certain general features are essential to an archive building. The first of

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<sup>1</sup>The building at Ibadan will become headquarters for the Western Region Branch when the proposed permanent headquarters of the National Archives of Nigeria is established at Lagos. Branch offices are now functioning at Kaduna and Enugu, the capital cities of the Northern and Eastern Regions.

these is that the building must provide the necessary facilities for all the functions that the institution is intended to execute. In a typical case, such a building must include a stack area or repository to be used for the permanent storage of documents; an office area to be used by archivists and other staff; a paper repair workshop and bindery, where damaged documents can be rehabilitated; a searchroom, where documents may be exploited by scholars and others; a library of reference works, which searchers and other inquirers can readily consult; a museum or exhibition area, where important state documents can be exhibited for general educational purposes; a reception area, where documents can be processed before classification; and a photographic laboratory, where copies of documents can be reproduced for searchers.

The second general feature of the building is that it must provide adequate security against such well-known enemies of documents as fire, flood, insects, rodents, theft, dust, and extremes of temperature and humidity.

Two incidental features are essential to an adequate archive building. The first, which arises from the fact that archives are organisms of perpetual growth, is that an archive building as a whole should be so constructed that it can be expanded, when necessary, without any detriment to its original design. Second, since archives are national monuments, any building constructed to house them ought to be adequate in its esthetic details.

### FUNCTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the functions of archival institutions differ in detail from country to country, it may be necessary to modify the essentials described above to suit the particular needs of each country. For example, if a country adopted the British system of devolving upon departments the practical responsibility for weeding, selecting, and classifying records, such a country would not require a processing area in its archive building. Similarly, a reference library would be superfluous if a national archives were situated near a national library, as is the case in certain countries.

In Nigeria, on the other hand, where the National Archives undertakes every responsibility connected with the acquisition, administration, and management of all the records of the Federation—be they federal, regional, semipublic, ecclesiastical, commercial, or private—it is imperative that our archive buildings possess the appurtenances incidental to archive administration in all its ramifications.

## DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

The writer holds the view that the work of designing and constructing buildings is the professional responsibility of architects, quantity surveyors, and structural engineers. This attitude arises from the belief that every profession has a right to guard its own frontiers and that undue interference by zealous amateurs would only provoke the hostility of the guardians. This being so, the role of the archivist in the construction of archive buildings should be limited to explaining, to those responsible, the purposes that the building must serve and to emphasizing the importance of providing adequate security within the structure. In our own case, one particular problem that the architects were left to solve was that of accommodating the project within the financial provision made for it. The practical conclusions reached on the various problems encountered may best be appreciated by a description of the building.

*General Features*

The block has been constructed as two units and sited on three acres of isolated ground. Its ground plan is shaped like a capital T, the downward stroke representing the repository wing and the top stroke the secondary wing. The library/exhibition area and the repair workshop are situated respectively on the left and right terminals of the cross stroke. The average internal height of all floors is  $9\frac{1}{2}$  feet. This dimension has been determined by the desire to avoid the use of ladders in the stackrooms.

*Drainage System*

Double-skin flat roofs have been provided throughout, with parapet walls to the main blocks. The roofs slope towards drains at the edges. The discharge of rainwater from these drains is controlled by drain pipes fixed at suitable points to keep flooding rainwater from collecting near the building.

*Dustproofing*

To keep down exterior dust, all the ground around the building is planted with Bahama grass and all approach roads are paved with tarmac.

*Hoist*

Provision has been made for the installation of a hoist at the junction of the main staircase area and the repository wing. This

will facilitate the movement of documents from the three floors of the repository to the searchrooms.

### *Repository Wing*

The core of the building is the repository wing containing the stackrooms for the permanent storage of the documents. All the administrative services and technical facilities are grouped around it with easy access at all levels. It is built on three floors, and each floor is divided in half by a firewall with steel communicating doors. At the end of each block is a fire escape staircase, which at a future date can also provide the connecting link for another repository of the same size.

Complete cross ventilation is provided for all areas of the repository wing, with standard adjustable grained glass louvered windows protected by steel bars on the inside. Sun protection for the external walls is provided by vertical fins between windows and by horizontal sun-breakers immediately above the windows. Both fins and sun-breakers project a foot and a half from the external wall surface, and thus protect the face of the walls from direct sunlight during the heat of the day. Entrance to the stackrooms is gained from the broad landing at each level, and the landings are interconnected by the main staircase, which runs the height of the building.

The internal length of the repository wing is 83 feet and its breadth (excluding an access verandah 5 feet wide) is 21 feet. Fourteen Crittal doors (6'8" by 3'8")<sup>2</sup> provide access to the stackrooms along the access verandah on each floor. The doors are separated from one another by a concrete wall more than three feet thick.

These structural dimensions have been determined by the size of the adjustable steel shelving—the principal equipment of the repository. The shelving is 18 inches deep, 8 feet long, and 5 tiers high, with the shelves spaced 18 inches apart. These measurements have been determined by the main contents of the stacks—cardboard boxes containing filed papers that constitute most of the record material in custody. Two sets of stacks, placed back to back, run from the walls separating the access doors from one another towards the opposite walls. This arrangement provides a three-foot gangway for each pair of stacks and a similar gangway running the whole length of the stackroom.

<sup>2</sup> Trade name of a popular type of metal door used in expensive public buildings in Nigeria.

The access verandahs on the first and second floors are fenced by concrete railings ( $3\frac{1}{2}'$  high), supported by pillars. The railings are pierced at the bottom at suitable intervals by six-inch vents. For security, the ground floor verandah is completely walled, with a precast pierced concrete block screen.

A peculiar feature of the repository wing is that the walls and the roof are entirely of steel, stone, and concrete. This arrangement has been partly determined by the heavy load to be borne by all the floors. Each half of the repository (comprising a volumetric space of about 15,700 cubic feet) is equipped with two air-conditioners of two horsepower each. The action of these units is checked by means of hair hygrometers installed in the stack rooms.

The flooring of the repositories—of cement—has proved disadvantageous in that during dry weather it gives rise to dust. An important feature of the repository wing is the complete absence of water mains.

### *Secondary Wing*

The secondary wing, comprising the operations and public areas and the administrative offices, is also planned on three floors and runs at a right angle to the repository.

## OPERATIONS AREAS

The operations areas are on the ground floors. They include photographic laboratories, a reception and fumigation area, now converted into a bindery; a processing, boxing, and labeling room, now converted into an office; a paper repair workshop; and a wide reception area.

### *Photographic Laboratories*

The photographic laboratories are situated near the public entrance. The screen wall running on the corridor adjacent to it is constructed of precast pierced concrete block. The laboratories comprise a photostat room ( $17'$  by  $15'$ ) and a room for microfilming and straight photography ( $17'$  by  $15'$ ). A store-room occupies part of the photostat laboratory. A printing darkroom ( $10'$  by  $10'$ ) is between the two laboratories and access to it is from a common corridor, which contains sinks for chemical mixing. Another darkroom ( $10'$  by  $10'$ ), for film processing, has been incorporated in the room for microfilming and straight photography. The main equipment in the photographic division

includes a microfilm camera, a Linhof camera, a microreader, a photostat camera, a siphon print washer, a print glazing machine, and a photostat print drier.

### *Bindery*

The area originally designed to serve the purposes of reception and fumigation has been converted into a bindery (40' by 15'), access to which may be gained from the corridor running through the ground floor. The area provides space for binding tables, presses, a guillotine, type stands, an electric borer, a plough, a board cutter, and an electric funditor lettering machine.

### *Reception Area*

A reception area (32' by 16'), which forms an extension of the general corridor, provides general access to the rooms on the ground floor. It has its own entrance and a covered unloading bay, approached from the service road on the rear side of the repository block. The entrance comprises two overhead doors measuring eight by eight. All newly acquired documents are initially processed here.

### *Paper Repair Workshop*

The paper repair workshop (40' by 15', excluding a small storeroom) forms a subsidiary arm to the secondary wing, to which it runs at a right angle. Its main contents are six repair tables, a sizing screen, and a stitching machine for assembling cardboard boxes. Access to it may be gained from a door on the main corridor.

### *Processing, Boxing, and Labeling Room*

This room (15' by 12', with a small storeroom) was originally designed for processing, boxing, and labeling of documents but has been converted into an office. It is situated opposite the paper repair workshop.

Like all other floors of the secondary wing, the ground floor is provided with toilets and cloakrooms.

## PUBLIC AREAS

The first floor of the secondary wing of the building is the public area. It consists of a library/exhibition room, a cataloging room, now converted into an office, two searchrooms, and a board or conference room. A separate entrance has been provided to

the public areas to facilitate the control of visitors. A through corridor, five feet wide, runs the length of the wing and terminates at the entrance to the conference room. Access to the various rooms in the area may be gained through the doors situated on this corridor. The internal dimensions of the rooms are approximately as follows: library/exhibition room, 35 by 16 feet; cataloging and classification room, 17 by 15 feet; searchroom A, 28 by 15 feet; searchroom B, 22½ by 15 feet; conference room, 21 by 17 feet.

The library is built on stilts over the public entrances. This arrangement provides cross ventilation in the library itself and a covered approach to the public entrance. Both sides of the library are fitted with wide louvered windows protected from excessive sunlight and rainfall by vertical fins, and horizontal sun-breakers projecting 1½ feet from the outer wall.

#### OFFICE AREAS

The office areas are on the second floor. The most prominent office is that of the Director, over the conference room. Its internal dimensions are 21 by 17 feet. Its facilities include a private balcony six feet wide on the south and west sides, as an added protection against the sun, a private toilet, and a cloakroom.

Next to the office of the Director are those of the Executive Secretary and Senior Archivist (each office measuring 15' by 11'), senior and junior staff cloakrooms, an archivist's office (15' by 11'), a stationery storeroom (15' by 5'), and a general office (22' by 15'). As on the other floors, a corridor five feet wide, ending at the door to the Director's office, runs through the office areas.

#### SUMMARY

So far as human calculation can provide, the building—both in its construction and the general precautions observed in its use—is fireproof, flood proof, insect proof, dustproof, and adequate in its structural and esthetic details. As would be expected, the principal precautionary measures are designed to prevent, detect, and check the incidence of fire. For this purpose, the building and the equipment installed within it are all of incombustible materials. In addition, a fire alarm system, firefighting equipment, and an adequate number of lightning rods have been installed. In order to insure the efficacy of all these contrivances, a 24-hour watch is kept over the building by day and night porters, who are trained to handle the firefighting equipment.



In a critical sense, however, the only peculiar thing about the building is that it is specially constructed to house Nigerian Archives. The calculations that preceded its construction are not apparent to the casual observer, and the protective devices are the customary ones that may be usefully included in any permanent structure.

The importance of the building in the general development of the Nigerian National Archives cannot be underestimated. In particular, the problems encountered in its construction and the lessons derived from its use contributed incalculably to the foundation of an archival service in this country, where the science of archive administration was hitherto unknown and unpracticed.

***"As they received it so they threw it . . ."***

There is a patent library in Moscow. There it is possible to become acquainted with any of the six million patents belonging to any of twenty-seven countries of the world. If you desire, they will place on your table the "privileges" (patents) issued to first Russian inventors already in the beginning of the past century, or, if you wish, the author's certificates entered in the card-index on the day of your visit. Arm yourselves, observe the actual search!

Only, there is an innumerable quantity of needs in the library. You simply wonder when and how its employees are able to fulfill their immediate duties: they must worry where to sit the respected inventor arriving with delay, how to protect the numerous patents against dust and mold, what to do with the photo laboratory that can hardly accommodate the three people . . .

Here is an eyewitness report. Constantin Nikeforevich Matsegora, Acting Director of the Moscow Patent Library, visited Stalingrad this past April.

My hair stood on end, he began his account. I arrived, I walked through the corridors of the library, I looked: there were nailed boxes, sealed packages lay around. My thought was, have they really obtained a new building and are preparing for moving? I examined, this was our patent and scientific technical literature! As they received it so they threw it into the corridors. In five years mountains were formed. There was certainly no mention of the patent department . . . And more! In other libraries, they say, the literature was thrown on a pile and then . . . burned: there was no room for storage! . . .

Recently an inventor told me an instructive story. He discovered a process for preventing curdling of milk. He went to the Committee, he filed the application for invention and he received a rejection: it turned out that in the archives there is preserved a patent issued to someone fifty years ago! . . .

— VALERII AGRANOVSKI, "Secrets of the Patent Library," in *Ekonomicheskaya Gazeta*, no. 3 (1961), p. 21; trans. by U. S. Patent Office in *Patent, Trademark, and Copyright Journal of Research and Education*, 5:275 (Fall 1961). Quoted by permission of the *Journal*.