

# What the Architect Needs To Know About Archives

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THE architect's role in the development of any successful functional building can be divided into several steps. The first and second steps that I shall mention are interchangeable and frequently are taken simultaneously. Our complex, rapidly changing society has placed heavy demands on the versatility of the architect. One day he is expected to design competently a church complex for a specific denomination, and the next day a jail, a 500-bed mental hospital, a high-rise office building, or a food-processing plant. In each case he is supposed to be an expert, utilizing the latest in functional planning, in materials of construction—mechanical, electrical, structural—and in equipment of various types. Of course, in the eyes of his client, he is above all an artist who just draws beautiful pictures! How is this one person to be so much and more to every client—each with a new and widely differing problem? The answer is simple: all architects must be super-geniuses! In my experiences, however, I have found few such people.

Why do we build buildings? From the beginning of time man has sought shelter from the elements and his foes. As society developed and became more complex, so, along with it, buildings became specialized. But they are still constructed primarily to provide shelter and protection for people and for the things they create. To design a functional building for a specialized purpose, the architect must therefore acquaint himself with the requirements of the problem and gain as nearly as possible a complete insight into the functions that are to take place in this shelter.

## RESEARCH

When the architect for such a project has been commissioned, his

\* The author, an architect with the firm of A. Thomas Bradbury & Associates, Atlanta, Ga., read this paper on Oct. 4, 1963, at a session on archival buildings and equipment at the 27th annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, in Raleigh, N.C. Among Mr. Schoenberger's recent commissions has been the designing of the new Georgia State Archives Building, now nearing completion.

first step should be research. Many sources are available to him—technical publications, information from material suppliers, consultants in various fields, and so on. But probably one of the most valuable sources of information is most frequently overlooked: his personal inspection of existing facilities. Here he has not only the opportunity to see what has been done, but—much more important—he can discuss with the people using the building what they would and would not do again if they had the opportunity to start over. The building engineer, the maintenance supervisor, even the janitor, can tell the architect many DO's and DON'T's.

Now where does the archivist fit into this picture? First, the professional person whose main interest is in the field of archives can be most helpful in planning the itinerary for the inspection, having furnished to the architect beforehand any technical bulletins he may have. Second, if the archivist accompanies the architect on the inspections as he talks with employees and looks at the existing facilities, a better ultimate program of requirements can be developed.

#### PROGRAMING

Next, the architect needs a written program of requirements from the archivist. This should outline the functions to be performed in the building and should include equipment to be used in each area—special electrical, communications, or other unusual equipment. It is also necessary to estimate the personnel in each area of the building and the number of people expected to use certain public facilities—such as the reading rooms and special meeting rooms. As the result of your earlier joint research with the architect, he can be of assistance to you in this phase of development.

#### SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS

How will you organize the spaces decided upon in the program, relating one to another so that the work will flow smoothly from one area to another and so that public areas will be convenient to each other and to service areas? What is the relationship of administration to the public—or to the work areas? Working with the archivist and without concern for fitting these functions into a building structure, the architect can graphically diagram these spatial relationships.

#### PRELIMINARY DRAWINGS

At this point the architect is now ready to organize your requirements into a framework of three-dimensional space on your

building site. (It is assumed that a budget has been established; this budget, of course, will affect the planning and materials to be considered unless money is no problem.)

Preliminary plans will show you not only spatial relationships but, by the indication of all furniture and equipment, how the sizes of the rooms were determined. Sketches of sections through the building, elevations, perspectives of the exterior, and perhaps some interior sketches should be included to illustrate clearly the architectural concept of the building. An outline specification covering the type of construction and finish of materials to be used on floors, walls, and ceilings of each room accompanies the preliminary drawings.

### WORKING DRAWINGS AND SPECIFICATIONS

The step from preliminary drawings to construction is a long and time-consuming one, performed in the office of the architect and requiring many men. Details of the design are developed. Structural systems are engineered. Electrical and mechanical systems are detailed. Special equipment is designed. Material and methods of application are defined in writing as specifications.

During this period the archivist and his assistants are called in for consultation to make certain that all details in their requirements have been included. Most public work requires that more than one product be specified so as to insure competition, and these items should be approved if they affect the performance of the archivist's work.

### BIDDING AND CONSTRUCTION

When all these contract documents are completed, the plans and specifications are printed, bound, and circulated to contractors for their bids. The contract is generally awarded to the low bidder unless there are some very special circumstances.

During the construction, the architect makes frequent visits to the site to insure that the finished building will comply throughout with the plans and specifications. If the architectural organization is set up to handle furnishings and landscape planning, it is desirable also that the architect prepare specifications and drawings for this work, thereby insuring a more integrated total concept.

Now that I have revealed to you all our secrets you can see that the architect is not the supergenius you thought he was. It is really the archivist who sets up the program—the architect is the guiding hand who finally assembles the archivist's ideas into concrete and steel.

# What the Construction Company Needs To Know About Archives

By N. O. WRIGHT\*

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THE invitation to speak to the members of the Society of American Archivists and of the American Association for State and Local History is indeed a singular honor, and it is a real pleasure to be here and to meet you. I should like at this point, however, to make a small confession to you. I had always thought of archivists and historians as being a group of people as ancient as the records they keep; now, having met you, I am most happy to admit that I have long labored under a delusion!

I have been asked to speak to you on the subject, "What the Construction Company Needs To Know About Archives." This subject involves a multiplicity of questions and answers; and I shall attempt, in the time allotted, to touch on the ones that are in my opinion the most important.

When my firm, the J. A. Jones Construction Co., selected me to supervise the construction of the State of Georgia's Archives Building in Atlanta, I went first to Webster's dictionary to ascertain the exact meaning of *archives*; second, I went to the plans and specifications prepared by the architects to visualize the Archives Building so that I might plan my mode of construction.

According to Webster, an archives is a place in which public records or historic documents are kept. From this definition I realized that such a building would require the most careful, the most minute attention to all phases of the work to insure a sound, safe, protective building in which to house these records and documents, to keep them for future generations so that citizens yet unborn might be able to examine these invaluable records and find them in perfect, usable condition.

\* Mr. Wright, a native of Louisiana, has had 20 years' experience with the J. A. Jones Construction Co. of Atlanta and has headed important construction projects in many States and in Okinawa and Iran. He is Project Director for the Georgia Archives Building and, according to the late Mary Givens Bryan, is "on the job, day and night, seven days a week." This paper was read on Oct. 4, 1963, at a session on archival buildings and equipment, of which Mrs. Bryan was chairman, at the 27th annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, in Raleigh, N.C.

To carry out such a building program and to insure the required meticulous result demand the most minute coordination among the architects, the subcontracting forces, and—most important—the journeymen employed by the prime contractor. Each step in the construction must be carefully planned in order to bring all the forces under control at the same precise moment, to fit each piece together, to see that each component meets the strict requirements of the architect, to the end that as the building moves from the foundation upward toward completion every phase is as perfect as is humanly possible. All of this the very nature of the building demands. To achieve this result the contractor must select carefully the subcontractors, the material suppliers, and the journeymen and laborers who are to participate in the construction of the Archives Building. All these people must be selected on the basis of their knowledge, their pride of performance, their confidence in their materials, and above all their integrity and their desire to contribute to such a monumental creation.

After a thorough screening of the various firms, suppliers, journeymen, and all connected with the building, the next step and the most delicate one is the actual start of the project. In our particular case this was indeed a problem. Our plans called for four basement floors, each 103,000 square feet in area, the bottom slab being 52 feet below street level. This, of course, required the removal of countless yards of dirt. Greatly increasing the difficulty of the work was the fact that our excavation was immediately adjacent to a very, very busy and heavily traveled thoroughfare. This presented difficulties not only in lateral support but also in the structural design of walls to support the immense pressure from the high bank of earth and to protect the base of the building from traffic vibration. Our building, to protect its valuable contents, had to be isolated from vibration, thus protecting the upper basement floors and the above-ground superstructure. Through coordination of the various crafts and the constant personal supervision of each foreman, we were able to impress on the men who work with their hands and tools the vast importance of this phase of the work and the massive load the substructure would carry. By their splendid cooperation and their realization of the importance of each worker to the other, we were able to raise this magnificent building from its firm and solid foundation.

Each person employed on such a project should feel and realize the importance of an archives building and should be eager to pursue his phase of the work with a sense of pride in performance, a

knowledge that he, too, is contributing to the character of the completed building. An archives building does indeed have a proud, significant character—of beauty and permanence, as if to say, “Look upon my magnificence; look into my contents; I house the most valuable documents in my great State!” And we know that the Archives Building of Georgia will have this character.

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“... liable to be burned up ...”

Headquarters Army of the United States  
Washington D.C. Mch. 13, 1874

Dear Hazen:

Capt Penney has just presented your letter, and has shown me a list of the papers you want copied. It would take him more than a year to copy them. Some of the Reports you ask for are in print, & I have explained to him where they can probably be found, viz. in the Book Stores to which they drift by some mysterious process known only to the Members of Congress. You must know that I have made repeated efforts to have published at the cost of the U.S. the official Reports of the Battles & Campaigns of the War, and my estimate for two thousand volumes is two hundred thousand dollars, & this would only supply the State Libraries. Even this would be better than to allow them to remain as now in manuscript liable to be burned up at any moment. Many of my archives turned over to Sheridan are already burned up in the Chicago fire, and all those in Washington are stored in perishable buildings.

I understand Congress once appropriated \$5000 to have these archives copied, but they quarrelled as to who should be employed as the agent. So small an appropriation was simply trifling with a serious matter. I have no hopes of Congress doing anything & yet the partial task that you aim to accomplish is beyond the private purse of any officer. It would cost you \$5000 to have the copies you ask for. It is simply impracticable for Capt. Penney to undertake it.

Yrs. truly,

W. T. SHERMAN

Gnl.

Besides the Records are in the custody of the Secretary of War & Adj. Gnl. and I doubt if he would give access to them to any one—unless for the Records properly your own.

—GEN. W. T. SHERMAN to Col. William Babcock Hazen, 6th U.S. Infantry, commanding officer, Fort Buford, Mont., Mar. 13, 1874, in the George Dewey papers in the Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.