

Carol M. Newman Library Of Virginia Polytechnic Institute

FLEXIBILITY, utility, efficiency; these are the three great factors that have dominated the planning of the new library at Virginia Tech during the past four years. The result of this planning is now in operation and, after several months of testing, the rather radical departure from the orthodox university library building seems justified beyond our fondest hopes.

The thinking behind this final building was based on four years of intensive study of the specific needs of Virginia Tech both for the present and for the predictable future. Virginia Polytechnic Institute, Virginia's land grant college since 1872, has never before had a library building designed to meet its individual needs. With a curriculum that is basically concerned with agriculture, engineering, science and business administration, emphasis is primarily on science and technology, with lesser attention paid to the humanities and social sciences. This factor alone had great influence on the ultimate design and allocation of space to provide the most functional building possible for the library's purpose.

The other predominating factors governing the final plans were the predictable growth of the student body during the next few years and the present rapid expansion of research and study at the graduate level. The present student body of 4,000 was accurately predicted three years ago. Using the same yardsticks (birth rate, influx of industry, etc.) it must be assumed that 1965 will see a student enrollment of at least 6,000. Transi-

tion from an undergraduate library to a great scientific and technological research library is taking place almost overnight. The only elements that govern the length of time to accomplish this objective are availability of funds to purchase research materials and an adequate staff to process them. Since these are problems common to almost every library, this observation is made only to point out that, because our ultimate goal is to serve not only the faculty, research staff and student body here on the campus but also advanced research by agriculture and industry throughout the state, it is hoped that funds from various sources will be made available to expedite the program.

Actually, the concept of our new building based on our broader needs for the predictable future began to emerge as far back as 1949. It was in this year that Dr. Maurice F. Tauber of Columbia University and William H. Jesse, director of libraries of the University of Tennessee, made an objective and realistic survey of the library situation at V.P.I. The steady



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progress made since that time is a tribute to the thoroughness of their work.

The next big step forward came in February, 1952, when the Virginia state legislature appropriated \$1,000,000 for construction of the new building. Joy was short lived, however, when the first set of plans showed only too clearly how little this sum would buy in the way of square footage and modern facilities in comparison with our actual needs. Only 47,000 square feet could be constructed and none of the facilities could be provided that is accepted as an essential part of the modern college or university library. At the darkest hour of planning and in almost story-book fashion, the Old Dominion Foundation came to the rescue with \$1,000,000 to match the state appropriation.

The architectural firm of Carneal and Johnston of Richmond was appointed, and during the following year 12 more sets of plans and several scale models were developed, each one an improvement on the one before. Dr. Walter S. Newman, president of V.P.I., has aptly termed the project of the new building as a cooperative venture. Starting with the original survey by Tauber and Jesse in 1949, many individuals have contributed to the financing, the planning, the constructing and the equipping of the Carol M. Newman Library. The final result is a pleasing exterior of native limestone with Indiana limestone trim in keeping with other buildings in the vicinity and an interior where everything from the color scheme to the acoustical treatment of floors and ceilings is conducive to concentrated study.

Bids for construction of the new building were opened November 18, 1953. Graham Brothers of Richmond were low bidders. Work was begun immediately and, except for spells of bad weather, continued without let-up until August 15, 1955. On that day we began moving in and integrating the book and periodical collections from the main and two

branch libraries as well as the more than twenty departmental libraries. On September 17, 1955, the new building was opened for the fall term.

In outlining and summarizing the location of facilities and materials, it would be well to keep in mind the basic principles of flexibility, utility and efficiency. The building itself is L-shaped with four floors and contains 111,585 square feet of floor space. Built in modules 27 feet square, the building has no load-bearing walls. There are no halls or corridors. Reader space and stack space are designated by furniture arrangement only. Lighting is by fluorescent tubes (5,339 of them) with a maximum efficiency of 60 foot-candles in both reader and stack areas. The 23½ miles of shelving are free-standing. Interchange of reader space and stack space, as necessity dictates in the future, can be done with a minimum of expense and confusion. Ceilings were purposely kept low to conserve space. On the main and second floors ceiling heights are 10 feet 6 inches and the top and basement levels are 8 feet 6 inches. The only "fixed" area in the entire building is a central core containing the elevator, a stairwell, a work space on each floor for the sorting and distribution of returned books, staff lockers and the plumbing stacks. So much for flexibility; it has been achieved so far as we can tell without any sacrifice whatever.

The utility of the new building is comparable to the best and most thoughtfully planned of any of the recent college and university library buildings. Seating capacity for 1,000 students under ideal conditions, shelf space for 1,000,000 volumes without crowding, and open stacks should do much during the next few years to bring the student and the book closer together. In addition, such facilities as 97 individual study carrels, six seminar rooms, a listening room for all types of recordings, a film viewing room for the showing of educational or recreational films and slides, and a photodupli-

cation laboratory of commercial quality will enable us to enter upon a new era of service and usefulness never before possible at V.P.I.

Allocation of space throughout the building has placed emphasis of efficiency of operation and use above everything else. Wherever it has been possible to save that extra ten steps, it has been done. This has been done both from the standpoint of the staff and the reader. For example, the main card catalog is about equidistant from the circulation desk, the periodical reference desk and the main reference desk. It is located just outside the door to the catalog department. Aside from the circulation desk, it is the first thing to meet the eye of anyone entering the building.

Every effort has been made to meet the convenience of the reader. On the main floor, for instance, are the periodical reading room, the main reading room and a small documents reading room.

The periodical reading services 1,000 current periodicals and 100 current newspapers. The main reading room gives service on all classified material except the 300's, 500's and 600's and on unclassified bound periodicals. This material is shelved in the basement directly under the main reading room, accessible by stairway near the main reference desk.

Two large reading rooms are located on the second floor: the biological sciences reading room and the physical sciences reading room. On this floor are also shelved the 300's, 500's and 600's which contain the great majority of the subjects normally called for by patrons of these two reading rooms. Duplication of the card catalog for these three classes is now in progress to avoid the necessity of going downstairs to consult the main catalog on each and every occasion.

From the standpoint of efficient handling of incoming material, perhaps a final word of explanation will not be amiss. Here again the principle that a straight line is the shortest distance be-



tween two points has been strictly adhered to. An all-weather unloading platform leads directly into the receiving room. Adjacent to the receiving room is the periodical checking room and the gifts and exchange office. Since a large proportion of incoming material falls into these two categories, it is a simple procedure to truck it a matter of ten feet at the most. The receiving room is adjacent to the elevator so that incoming purchases are placed on a truck and taken up one floor by elevator. On the floor above, the elevator is located just outside the door of the processing unit.

A flow of work has been set up to avoid any necessity for handling a book more than once. The processing department is located in a room 27 feet wide by 74 feet long with the order department just inside the door. After a book has been checked in, it progresses through the various steps of cataloging and classification. By the time it reaches the far end of the room it is ready for bookplating, labeling and pocketing.

Maybe too much stress has been laid on flexibility, utility and efficiency. If so, this point may be argued at some later and more appropriate time. Certainly we have no high-domed ceilings or hand-carved paneling to point to with pride. On the other hand we do have a pleasant, well-equipped, sturdily built library that after several months of occupancy seems to be entirely functional.