

Description of the Blackstone Library Building by the Architect, Solon S. Beman of Chicago

The library grounds, which are of ample size, occupy a central and commanding point on the main street.

The building is designed in the purest Grecian Ionic style; the architectural details being taken from the beautiful Erechtheion of the Athenian Acropolis. The exterior, including the roof of the dome, is entirely of Tennessee marble of a very light tone.

The main front, the principal feature of which is a beautiful colonnade of fluted Ionic columns of marble, is toward the south. Back of the colonnade and extending its full length is an open loggia, reached by a broad flight of marble steps. Over this portico is a Greek attic story with pediment. The central portion of the building is two stories high, dominated by a graceful low dome of marble. Flanking this central mass on the west and east are two circular one story and basement wings, containing respectively the stack room and main reading room

The extreme outside dimensions of the building are 162 by 129 feet, the plan approximating the form of a Latin cross.

The construction of the building is of the most permanent character, and is fire-proof throughout, steel beams, tile arches and partitions, being used.

In the basement is located the boiler room, heating apparatus, store rooms, gymnasium, bath rooms, etc.

The main floor is devoted to the lecture hall, librarian's room, students' rooms, reading room and stack or book room. This floor is approached from the outside by a flight of marble steps 39 feet wide, terminating at a deeply recessed loggia back of the Ionic colonnade. Passing this loggia and through a spacious marble vestibule, the rotunda or central feature of the building is reached. The massive main entrance doors are of pure bronze, of rich design and weigh nearly 2,000 pounds.

The rotunda is octagonal in form, and the various departments, such as reading room, lecture hall, stack room, etc., are centered on the axial lines radiating from the center of the rotunda. The rotunda is 44 feet in diameter and is paved with a fine marble mosaic floor, made from a special design in Paris. The walls, piers, arches and entablature of the rotunda are entirely of polished marble.

The dome which covers this rotunda is embellished with large paintings, illustrating the history or evolution of book making. These pictures are set in panels and are each about 6 by 9 feet. Their respective titles are "Gathering the Papyrus," "Records of the Pharaohs," "Stories from the Iliad," "Mediaeval Illumination," "Venetian Copper-plate Printing," "First Proof of Gutenberg Bible," "Franklin Press," and a "Book Bindery, 1895." The paintings are the work of the well known artist, Oliver Dennett Grover of Chicago. Mr. Grover has also painted the medallion portraits of New England authors, placed in the marble spandrills between the arches. These portraits are of Longfellow, Holmes, Hawthorne, Lowell, Whittier, Bryant, Emerson and Mrs. Stowe. The large dome paintings are framed in the richly ornamented and gilded ribs of the dome. The rotunda is lighted from an ornamental skylight forming the eye of the dome. The extreme height of the dome from floor is fifty feet.

Opening off the rotunda to the right as you enter is the main reading room, 38 feet wide and 40 feet long, one end being circular in form. In the handsome fire-place hangs a portrait of Hon. James Blackstone, father of the donor of the building. This room is floored with marble mosaic and finished in oak.

Opening off this reading room are two students' rooms communicating with the central rotunda. The furniture of these rooms is from the architect's designs and is of white oak, to correspond with the finish of the rooms.

To the left of the rotunda and directly opposite the reading room is the stack or book room. This room is the same in dimensions as the reading room, and corresponds to it in form. In the circular end the book stacks are placed, and set radiating from a common center. The book stacks are of iron, of rustless finish, and are two stories in height. The floor of the second story or gallery is slate and is reached by a central staircase of marble.

Off the stack room are the librarian's room and the catalogue room, both of which communicate with the rotunda. The floors of all these rooms are laid with marble mosaic.

The librarian's room is provided with a fire-proof vault.

Opening from the central rotunda to the north is the staircase hall, and vestibule to lecture room. The walls and ceiling of the hall are entirely finished in polished marble. The stairs to the second story and basement are of solid marble built self-supporting on the arch principle.

The architraves of all door-ways, of halls, rotunda and vestibules are richly moulded and carved.

The lecture room opens from this hall. It is finished in antique white oak, richly paneled and carved to a height of 16 feet all around the room. The platform is set in a circular niche with an arched ceiling, and provided with retiring rooms on each side. The lecture room is 50 feet long and 40 feet wide, and its ceiling of elliptical form and paneled, the spring line of arch being from top of wainscotted walls. The room is well lighted by large windows in the side walls. The seating capacity is 350 for main floor and 50 for gallery.

The second story of the building is reached by the marble staircase already referred to. At the head of the stairs and opening to the right is the entrance to the lecture hall gallery. Immediately in front is the trustees' room, and to the left the hall opens on the octagonal corridor surrounding and overlooking the rotunda. The rotunda side of the corridor is protected by a marble balustrade and is surrounded by eight marble arches, springing from the balustrade level, and supporting the dome. From this corridor and through the arches the best view of the dome paintings is obtained. Opening off the rotunda corridor are three rooms which may be used for art galleries. With these are connected ladies' and gentlemen's parlors and toilet rooms. All the floors are laid with marble mosaic and antique oak is used for finish.

The toilet rooms throughout the building are floored with marble mosaic and wainscotted with marble, and the plumbing is of the best modern sanitary character, all pipes exposed and nickel-plated.

The building is heated by a combination of indirect and direct systems. All radiator screens and registers are of solid bronze from special designs. The staircase balustrades and finishing hardware are also of solid bronze.

All of the windows are glazed with plate glass.

The light fixtures are of bronze of graceful design, and arranged for both gas and electric light.

The decorations of the various rooms are in harmonious colors, in plain tints.

The construction of the dome is of the most substantial character, being built of solid concrete and roofed with marble eight inches thick.