Library Construction:

the Relationhip Between the Architect and Library Director

by Mae L. Rodney

Since library construction runs in a twenty-year cycle, many architects and library administrators do not participate in such a project. When the opportunity does come, the participants dream of a perfect product, a goal not easily accomplished since several groups are actively involved with planning, design, and construction of the building. The planning process used, planning committee composition, community analysis results, sponsoring agency's agenda, funding provided, construction companies utilized, and working relationship of the library administrator and the architect all impact upon a project's relative success.

This article provides a general perspective of library construction; the thoughts expressed reflect experiences which the author had during construction and renovation of the O'Kelly Library at Winston-Salem State University. Other perspectives can be acquired from recent books and articles which describe library design programs, current trends in construction and the new emphasis in library building standards that can be reviewed before planning and construction begin. For example, Holt, (1989), and Kaser (1989) provide clear perspective on the planning/construction processes.[1,2] Healey (1991) describes an unusual means - "a charrette" - to develop complete schematic plans for a public library.[3] This methods allows the architect to work with everyone interested in the library project.

Library building/planning committees usually consist of varied community representatives; the library administrator normally serves on the committee and occasionally acts as committee chairperson. The committee formulates and completes a community analysis and the identified needs are translated into the library building program. Since the focus of this article is the relationship between the library administrator and architect, there will be little additional discussion about the committee. However, the committee's size and the administrator's functions on the committee have a significant impact on the project's outcome and the relationship between the architect and library administrator.

After the building committee has reviewed and approved the community analysis results, the architect is selected. When public funds support the project, several firms present project proposals and provide other relevant background information to assist in the final selection. Jones suggests evaluating architects to ascertain whether their "goals are to create buildings of beauty, to lend distinction to the names of their firms (and that lead to other commissions)." He also advises the selection committee to "visit and review layouts for other buildings designed by the architects" to help select an architectural firm which will create a building that meets the library program objectives.[4]

During the review/selection process, the selection team should determine whether diverse design styles are utilized by the firm, or whether all projects are approached with a similar basic design. In addition, consideration should be given to whether styles are regularly used that would be contrary to effective library design, such as balconies which result in unwanted noise being transmitted between the floors and too much usable space being lost, or use of irregular shapes which may require specially designed furniture.[5]

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A collaborative relationship and the architect's and library administrator's willingness to move between leader and follower at the appropriate stages of the work are instrumental in the project's success. During the introductory meetings with the principal architect, the library administrator's role is community and library expert, and the architect is the technician. During predesign discussions, information is shared which must be digested and retrieved at later dates. For example, the architect gives projected completion dates for the various design stages, final dates for changes, and tentative completion dates for the blueprints. The library administrator shares information about the role of university administrators and major funders in reviewing and approving the design, and community and alumni concerns such as the link between historical traditions and existing architecture.

Communication and commitment are also important for a cooperative relationship between architect and library administrator. Direct communication is vital. The ideal situation is for the architect and library administrator to work principally on the design with the building committee and other groups reviewing designs prior to the beginning of major phases. This arrangement allows designs to be developed with fewer conflicting concepts. The primary library representative must be totally committed to the project and other responsibilities should be set aside or carefully scheduled until the building is occupied.

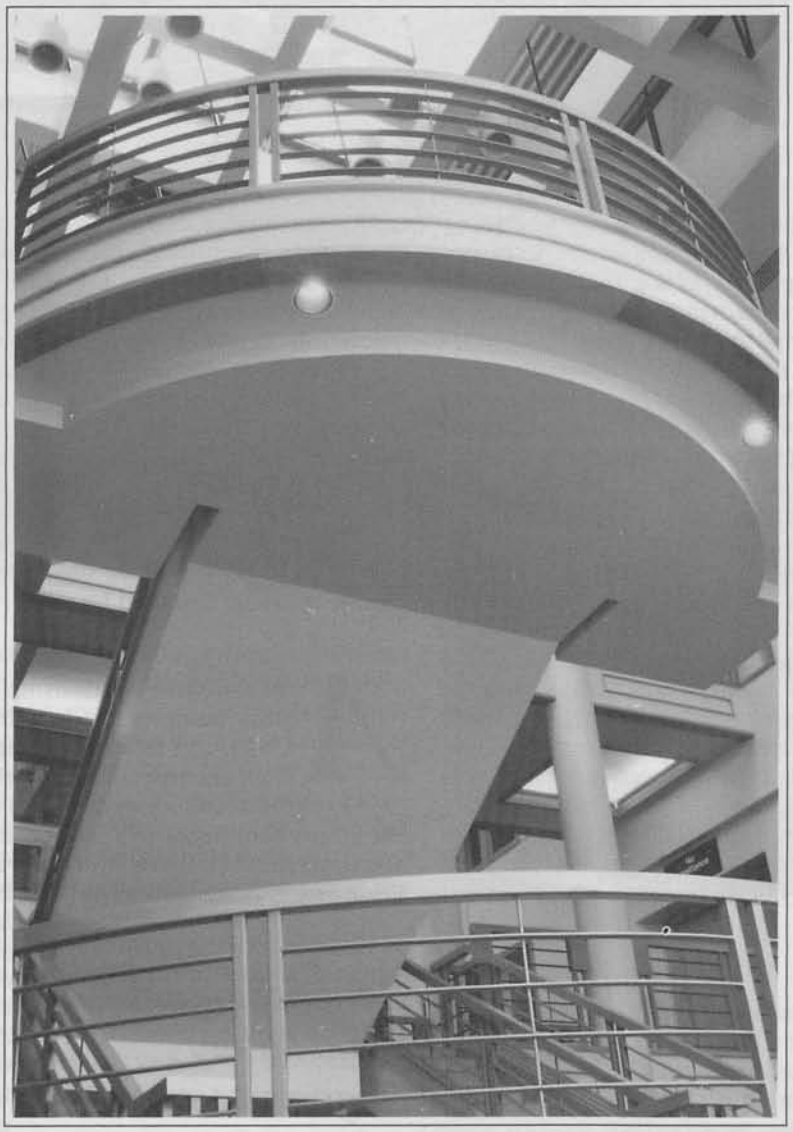
As the planning process begins, the library administrator informs the architect about library functions when necessary, describing varied activities which occur and emphasizing that libraries are more than storehouses or supermarkets. The administrator stresses what components must be present to ensure that information moves efficiently in the building; patron and staff need for ready access to collections are outlined during initial discussions. The importance of a library's design for effective service is also emphasized by the library director.

Additional guidance is provided by defining at an early stage the building's function either as a library *only* or as a multipurpose facility with meeting or reading rooms, elevators, and rest rooms accessible after regular hours. (Twenty-four hour study rooms with reduced staffing may be included in plans of academic libraries.) Outlining these requirements early allows the architect to consider spatial relations as well as electrical, plumbing, and security requirements. The library administrator can further mold the building's design by indicating whether an addition, renovations, or new construction would be utilized the next time to update the building.

Yet another way library administrators help during the design stage is to identify habitual concerns which occur in library buildings, such as security for books and personnel, service desks, dark corners, good traffic flow, and conveniently located rest room facilities.

The library administrator is committed to a functional, convenient, user-friendly building while the architect is concerned with symmetry, a little design intrigue, and possibly a desire to make a name for himself. These divergent views can be merged effectively when the two discuss needs and plans. An attractive and functional building will be designed which accomplishes both the library director's and the architect's goals when the library administrator is able to recommend changes which can be included in the design concepts.

The initial discussions between the library administrator and architect will be very beneficial as the project develops and as other designers and engineers become involved. The principal architect is aware of the particulars desired by the library administrator and he becomes responsible for protecting the design's integrity and ensuring that required concepts, functions, and spatial relations are included. One of the preliminary designs for O'Kelly Library had the Archives area on the second floor and the Director's Office on the first floor adjacent to the Circulation and Reference Departments. Modifications moved the Director's Office from this activity hub and placed Archives in a naturally cool, less humid first floor area which is partially underground. These were significant changes because other areas had to be relocated; but since the requests were made early in the design process, the adjustments were made without disrupting the architect's design schedule.



This steel frame staircase provides access to all three stories of the sky-lighted atrium of the C. G. O'Kelly Library at Winston-Salem State University. The stair gracefully combines curved and straight lines, permitting the visitor to walk alternately towards the building interior and a floor-to-ceiling wide bay window while viewing the two brightly colored full-length murals painted on either side of the atrium.
Designed by Gantt-Hubermann, Architects; Photo: R. A. Simon.

As the architect transfers the program from words into drawings, the library administrator becomes the ultimate "safety inspector". Every aspect of the design is checked for traffic flow, spatial relations, department locations, potential workflow, location of rest rooms, elevators, etc. When electrical/telecommunication locations are designated, the library representative must again check every location to determine whether sufficient outlets are included. Technical service areas such as cataloging departments and computer rooms must be checked for location and quantity of outlets. These checks attempt to guarantee that the building will, indeed, meet the library's programmatic needs.

As drawings develop and change, they must be regularly reviewed by the library administrator and the planning committee to verify that requested components are included in appropriate locations, with desired changes communicated promptly to the architect. The complexity of a library building and the variety of changes requested may require the creation of a checklist to verify that changes and program requirements are incorporated as the design progresses.

When preliminary blueprints are presented, the architect will walk the library administrator through each page, pointing out important design aspects and explaining some technical areas. Be sure to ask for laymen's terminology when construction

jargon is spoken such as "24-hour fire walls", or other technical terms for building materials and techniques.

Architects are very concerned about overall appeal and attractiveness of the building. They consider color, furniture, shelving layout, location of service desks, signage, and how everything will appeal aesthetically to users. In some cases, the architect will design the building while the interior design is the responsibility of another firm; or the library administrator may make many of these interior design decisions. During the interior design stage, the director continues to consider library functions, aesthetics, and efficient library services. Interior design approvals or revision requests include considering a panoramic view from service desks and relocating tall shelving when views are obstructed.

Lighting is a concern for both the architect and the library administrator, and their opinions may be quite different. For example, library administrators advocate controlled natural lighting to avoid damaging library resources while architects delight in using natural light. A compromise using today's tinted glass and vertical blinds allows natural lighting in a controlled manner. Although the concept of dark spots may have been discussed during initial meetings, the importance of locating artificial lights to benefit library patrons and workers cannot be emphasized enough. Reliable lighting which included using some natural light was a concern discussed during the design process at Winston-Salem State University. This request was included in the design, with floor-to-ceiling windows on the first floor that overlooks the western section of campus. The artificial lighting is such that only one dark spot exists in the entire building. The Waters and Winters article on lighting is a helpful guide to contemporary trends in library lighting.[6]

The electrical concerns such as provisions for computers, both personal and mainframe, book detection systems, etc., should be high on the library administrator's checklist. Architects are not aware that computers consume so much of a library's energy and program needs, thus sufficient provisions may not be considered initially. Again, the library director guides the architect in the quantity and locations of electrical and telecommunication outlets. If possible, locate outlets on floors, columns, and walls to allow effective use of space and personnel.

The library administrator should adhere to schedules for design changes as the design and blueprints are developed. The last date for changes should be respected, since changes after the established deadline can require additional charges and significant project delays. Engineers and other designers are responsible for the electrical, mechanical, plumbing, and heating/air conditioning designs. A minor change in the location of an office can impact on all of the separate special blueprints.

The relationship between the library administrator and architect will change again during construction. The architect becomes the leader. Communication lines between the library administrator, architect, and construction personnel outlined during the first construction meeting should be followed closely, because even a relatively simple request to relocate a door during construction results in increased construction costs. Also, adhering to lines of communication is important as construction progresses because the library director can become the middle man in a squeeze play. This will become particularly obvious when the contractor is

interested in completing the project under bid costs and the architect is committed to completing the project as designed.

After the project is awarded, the prime contractor and architect will agree upon the duration of the project and establish a timetable when various stages will be completed. The schedule is used to set up all outside activities such as inspections, delivery dates for concrete, air-conditioning units, shelving and furniture, etc. The architect and prime contractor work to keep the project on schedule. During the early months of construction, the library administrator observes the work from a distance, with the architect providing progress reports to the library administrator. The principal participants at this point are the construction workers and the contractors. Construction meetings that involve all prime and subcontractors are held regularly, and the library representative should attend these meetings. When the library administrator does not attend construction meetings, completion dates and dates for installation of permanent furnishings such as shelving are provided by the architect. Accurate completion dates are vital to the library director because plans regarding relocation of services, possible closing of service areas, scheduling moving crews, etc., have to be carefully planned; it is very expensive to have a moving crew waiting when a building has not passed inspection.

The architect and other trained personnel such as state or local construction office representatives inspect the building during various construction stages. During the last months and weeks of construction, the library director works with the architect to inspect the building, searching for construction oversights, leaking roofs, leaking sprinkler systems, poorly laid carpet and tile or unsatisfactory cabinet work, etc. The architect creates a punch list of corrections which is circulated to contractors. The punch lists allow contractors to make needed corrections before the final inspection. When library administrators are involved in inspections, last minute surprises before occupancy are reduced. In addition, red flags go up for problems that may surface during the warranty period.

A library director may assume that work is over when the building is occupied, but that is far from the case. The partnership between the librarian and architect is just as important then as when the building is being designed. The library administrator becomes the town crier, informing the architect of all postconstruction concerns. The library administrator still is the "safety inspector"; every time it rains, windows, corners and other joining areas are checked for leaks. Eyes are always turned up to spot stained tiles.

During the one-year warranty on the project, all construction problems are identified and corrected by the appropriate contractor. The construction project is not closed out until the end of the warranty period. The library administrator should routinely report all problems to the architect during the year to ensure that errors or nonfunctioning items are corrected. For example, after the computer for the online system was relocated to O'Kelly Library the system would crash every Friday. Through the diligent logging of dates and times by the computer operator and constant pressure by the architect and library director, the electrical contractor worked with the library staff until the problem was identified, through a process of elimination, and was corrected. Correspondence identifying specific problems provide vital documentation for the architect; indicating how long a problem has existed and providing directions for correcting problems.

The responsibilities of the library administrator and architect change throughout the project. If both parties can share their ideas, and know when to compromise and change roles, then a harmonious relation will develop. When a congenial relationship exists, design changes can be requested promptly, concerns will be swiftly identified, construction oversights are corrected without delays, and a functional, attractive building is the result.

References

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[4]William G. Jones, "Academic Library Planning: Rationality, Imagination, and Field Theory in the Work of Walter Netsch —A Case Study," *College and Research Libraries* 51 (May 1990) 207-220.

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[6]Bradley A. Waters and Willis C. Winters, "On the Verge of a Revolution: Current Trends in Library Lighting," *Library Trends* 36 (1987): 327-350.

Suggested Readings

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