

What To Do Until The Architect Comes

William J. Kirwan

FIRST: Read the preface and Part I of *Mason on Library Buildings*.¹ His chapter titled "A Brief Overview of Library Building Planning" is the best introduction to the subject in the literature, and although he is primarily an academic consultant his recommendations are applicable to all types of library buildings. The same is true of his chapter on "Writing the Library Building Program" which contains a succinct description of the respective responsibilities of the architect and the librarian in the building planning process. Mason does make some statements which indicate the ideal rather than the possible. He implies that only architects who have designed at least two libraries should be considered and only those who have designed successful libraries should be hired. However, he also states that very few successful academic libraries have been built. If his advice were taken literally, only a handful of firms would design all of the academic libraries in North America. But this is a minor quibble. His emphasis on the responsibility of the librarian to be an informed and active client, and the methods for achieving this, make the work essential reading for any librarian about to become involved in a building project.

SECOND: Write or phone the Library Administration Management Association of the American Library Association and ask for (1) their bibliographies on library building planning, (2) the list of library building programs which are available from ALA, (3) a list of library building consultants.

Unfortunately the articles and books listed in the ALA bibliographies are of widely varying quality. But plunge in, and eventually you will end up with a few articles and books, or chapters from books, that you will want to pass on to the Planning Committee. Among these will probably be *Designing and Space Planning for Libraries* by Aaron and Elaine Cohen,² a book on interior design applicable to all types of libraries.

When you obtain the list of building programs, select several that seem appropriate and borrow them via interlibrary loan from the ALA Headquarters Library.

THIRD: Form a Planning Committee. Mason has some excellent recommendations about the membership and function of this committee.³ He mentions certain campus offices. Non-academic librarians should not ignore those passages, but substitute the offices or agencies that perform those same functions within the larger bureaucracy of which they are a part.

FOURTH, FIFTH: Write the library building program and hire a building consultant. These two steps may be reversed or occur simultaneously. Ideally the librarian would write the first draft of the program. It would then be submitted to the consultant and the Planning Committee for their comments and suggestions. However, in some cases, the librarian may prefer to have the consultant involved in the writing of the first draft.

There is much in the literature on writing building programs. Please remember that in North Carolina the building code requires that open stacks have 42" minimum aisles. This is not typical and therefore formulas for stack space or total square footage requirements which appear in the literature must be used with caution. If they are based on the standard 36" aisle an upward adjustment needs to be made. Aisle size also affects column spacing or bay size. (Bay: one of the rectangular units of space into which a modular construction is divided.⁴) Most of the bay sizes suggested in the literature will not work well with a 42" aisle. If the library is to have large areas of open stacks it is essential to read Chapters Four and Eight and Appendix B of Keyes Metcalf's *Planning Academic and Research Library Buildings*.⁵ This will provide a thorough explanation of the effect of aisle widths on bay size and columns.

SIXTH: Select an architect. I disagree with those who would consider only a firm which has previously designed libraries. The individual architect who coordinated the design of those libraries may no longer be with the firm. It seems more pertinent to require that the Principle-in-Charge or the Project Designer, if they are not the same person, should have had previous experience in coordinating the design of a building of similar functional complexity as the project at hand, e.g. a medium sized hospital is at least as complex, if not more so, than a medium sized library. Experience in designing a branch bank may be an asset in designing a branch library.

The Federal Government, when it procures architectural and engineering services, requires firms interested in a project to provide general information about themselves and the work they have done which "best illustrates current qualifications relevant to this project."⁶ The forms used to obtain this information have appeared in *Architectural Record*,⁷ and can be easily modified to fit local circumstances. Requiring interested firms to fill out such a form will aid in the selection process. Among other things, the form should require the name of the Project Designer and the Principle-in-Charge who would be assigned to the job. The names of previous clients with whom these individuals have worked should also be furnished. One of the most important questions to be asked of these references is: Did the architect satisfactorily provide the functional requirements conveyed by the client? If the architects are expected to specify the furniture or signage, or both, the form should be adopted to require information about these capabilities.

The architects should be required to hire a lighting consultant and an acoustical consultant. The form should provide a space for the name of each and their relevant work.

SEVENTH: Once an architect has been selected, the Principal-in-Charge, the Project Designer, the librarian and the other members of the Planning Committee should, together, visit some libraries of the same type to be designed. It is important that the libraries visited contain good examples of functional space relationships and these should be called to the architects' attention. Undesirable features should also be pointed out. The librarian should also ask the architects for their reactions to the buildings being visited. In this way each party will gain a better understanding of the perspective the other brings to the building planning process. Such understanding is a great asset in producing a good library.

EIGHTH: Examine the drawings at each stage of development to keep them consistent with the requirements of the program given to the architects. There are a couple of points I wish to add to the existing literature on this process. Architects have been known to reply to a request to change plans, before being put out to bid, by stating that the modification could be handled by a change order. The architect is technically correct. But the librarian should understand that the pricing of the modification would take place after construction contracts have been awarded. This means that one contractor will have an exclusive right to do the work, and his price must be accepted if the modification is to take place. With rare exceptions change orders are always more expensive than modifications made prior to the bid opening.

The other point concerns construction progress meetings. The librarian should attend all of these meetings. What may appear to be a minor change to a contractor and architect, agreed upon at one of these meetings, could prove to have a significant impact on the function of the library.

SUMMARY: A good library building is the result of collaboration between architect and librarian. Architects want to produce buildings that will meet the functional requirements of their clients. It is the responsibility of the librarian to communicate these requirements, at the outset, to the architect and to make sure they are reflected in the plans and specifications as they are developed. When the architect arrives, the librarian should be prepared for this collaboration.

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References

1. Ellsworth Mason. *Mason on Library Buildings* (Metuchen, N.J., Scarecrow Press, 1980), pp. vii-ix, 1-60.
2. Aaron Cohen and Elaine Cohen. *Designing and Space Planning for Libraries, a Behavioral Guide* (New York, R.R. Bowker, 1979).
3. Mason, *Mason on Library Buildings*, p. 3.
4. Keyes Melcalf. *Planning Academic and Research Library Building* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1965), p. 416.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-66, 133-174, 387-396.
6. Meisan, Walter A. "New Year Resolution for A-E's: Update your SF 254," *Architectural Record* 159, no. 1 (January 1976): 67.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 67.



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