



S. K. STEVENS

THE WILLIAM PENN MEMORIAL MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES BUILDING

BY S. K. STEVENS*

THE Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission emphasizes that the new building is not primarily an office facility, but a public building of monumental stature designed to meet and to serve important state-wide needs in the field of historical, cultural and educational activity.

When and Why the Building Was Proposed

Ever since persons became concerned with adequate facilities necessary to preserve the manuscripts and records which form the basis for the history of Pennsylvania, it has been recognized that the Commonwealth itself did not have any building or part of a building properly suited to this purpose. The State Archives were transferred from pillar to post and finally were squeezed into three small rooms in the Education Building when it was completed. The space is entirely inadequate and proper facilities for care and use of manuscripts or records cannot be accommodated. Though the Legislature created by statute a State Museum shortly after 1900, it was likewise never provided with a proper building, and finally ended up sharing its present antiquated and unsafe building with the Legislative Reference Bureau. The building was not designed for museum use. It has been called a firetrap and is entirely unsuited to and inadequate for good State Museum operation. Through the years priceless historical, archival, and museum treasures have been lost, destroyed, or taken out of the Commonwealth to other places with better facilities because of the lack of an adequate building in Harrisburg.

The celebration in 1944 of the Tercentenary of the birth of William Penn revived interest in establishing in Harrisburg a proper

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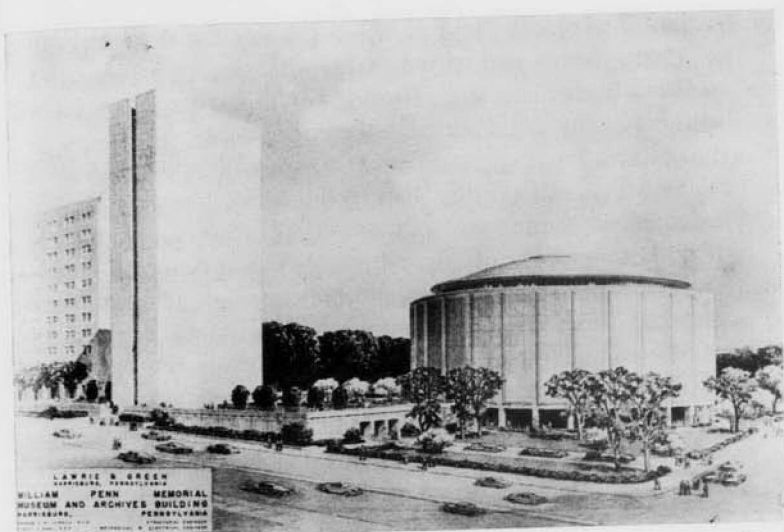
memorial dedicated to the Quaker Founder. Violet Oakley's paintings in the Capitol are now the only recognition given William Penn in all of Harrisburg. Boise Penrose rates a statue, but not Penn. Some building similar to the Lincoln Memorial was suggested, but on further thought it was agreed that William Penn would have desired a useful rather than a purely ornamental building, if he had any choice in the matter of memorials. The idea of a William Penn Memorial which would house the historical, archival and museum treasures of the Commonwealth Penn founded was broached to Governor Edward Martin and received his full approval. In 1945 the General Assembly passed an act which specified that such a building should be made a part of the Capitol Park Extension program. Mainly because ground was not then available, the funds allocated were not then used, but diverted to other purposes. The project was revived under the administration of Governor Leader and land for the Memorial was acquired. Governor Lawrence gave the project his enthusiastic support, and funds to undertake the Memorial were allocated by the General Assembly late in 1959 and approved by General State Authority in January, 1960.

What Purposes Will the William Penn Building Serve?

The purposes or functions which this building will serve may best be presented in summary form:

A Penn Memorial

It will provide a major dignified and useful public building in the Capitol Park Extension which will memorialize the founder of Pennsylvania. This will be accomplished not merely through the name for the building, but by a Memorial Hall on the main entry floor which will contain an heroic statue of William Penn and presentations in art forms devoted to the life and the progressive ideas of government, toleration, and freedom of thought and religion which make Pennsylvania's Founder a major figure in the Free World's history and ideology. Here will be properly and safely displayed also for the first time the priceless Penn documents such as Pennsylvania's Charter, the Frames of Government, etc., which are



Architect's Drawing of the William Penn Memorial Museum and Archives Building.

now tucked away in safes and never seen by the public. Here will be a truly great Memorial Hall of Pennsylvania's founding, and of such a nature as to make a profound impression upon any visitor.

A Proper and Notable Pennsylvania State Museum

The William Penn Building will provide for the first time a decent and adequate State Museum for the Commonwealth. What important purposes will such a State Museum serve? Among them are:

For the first time the Commonwealth will have a Museum Building of sufficient size and with adequate facilities for both storage and display to attract to its collections the finest things which Pennsylvanians may wish to present for preservation and the enjoyment of all the citizens of Pennsylvania for all time to come. No longer will it be necessary to watch priceless collections of art and art objects disappear from Pennsylvania and find a place in museums in other parts of the nation.

The new State Museum will provide facilities for the presen-

tation of adequate displays which portray the flora and fauna of Pennsylvania and its mineral wealth as contrasted with the present inadequate and crowded conditions under which the natural history of Pennsylvania is presented.

Large areas of the new State Museum will be devoted to displays which will portray vividly the entire historical development of the Commonwealth, including not only political history, but the story of our industries, our agriculture, of labor and the farmer, the schools, and the churches. It is anticipated that the imagination of many individuals and organizations connected with these phases of Pennsylvania life will be excited by the prospect of such a State Museum and that many of these exhibits will be developed cooperatively with these individuals and organizations and donated to the State. Bell Telephone of Pennsylvania, for example, has already proffered its services in developing communication exhibits.

Dioramas already under construction include a sequence depicting development of the rifle from crossbow to the Pennsylvania-Kentucky long rifle; period rooms for display of antique furnishings; and an extensive transportation exhibit from Indian canoes to Conestoga Wagons, antique automobiles, and early airplanes manufactured in Pennsylvania.

New natural history specimens are being received every day. Recent acquisitions are a family of bears, a golden eagle, several elk and various and sundry smaller mammals. Aquariums will be installed for live specimens of the aquatic world. The large and new exhibit facilities also will provide a place to tell the story of Pennsylvania government. Special exhibits of both a permanent and a temporary nature will be possible through which departments of the state government will have an unrivaled opportunity to present their story to a large audience. Facilities for originating TV shows live in the State Museum will greatly broaden this service and coverage. For example, the story of the public health movement or of conservation of natural resources should be developed in cooperation with such state departments as Health and Forests and Waters.

The State Museum will become a major educational center for all of Pennsylvania. This will be accomplished in part

through normal visitation by children and adults who will be provided a vastly improved picture of the Pennsylvania story. It will be accomplished also through new facilities for the development of adequate statewide educational programs using State Museum resources, and reaching into the schools. Portable exhibits, slides, and films will constitute a part of this expanding educational activity. The building plan calls for a Planetarium where space age study may center.

The increasing use of TV in education means that an adequate State Museum must provide the facility for a great enlargement of its coverage and its educational potential through live and taped television media centering upon and utilizing the resources of a really outstanding State Museum.

Last, but certainly not least among the points of importance attached to the new William Penn State Museum, will be its value in terms of the tourist industry. Pennsylvania has such a varied history and culture that any presentation of it in a distinctive State Museum will make that building one of the show places and centers of attraction for visitors to Pennsylvania. It will have, as its reputation is established, a pulling power in the central part of the Commonwealth as great as any single attraction outside of Gettysburg. More people visit New York's Metropolitan Museum than visit Yankee Stadium. Museums are big business all over the country in terms of increasingly large scale visitation. A good Pennsylvania State Museum will attract thousands who might not otherwise even visit the state's capitol.

THE DESIGN OF THE BUILDING

The combination of a circular design for the State Museum portion of the William Penn Building with a tower-like structure for the Archives and Records unit was dictated by the location of the new building in relation to surrounding structures, and also by practical problems of using the Museum by the public. The State Art Commission after very careful consideration approved it as not only necessary, but architecturally and artistically desirable. The Historical and Museum Commission staff in working with the architects on plans for the Museum unit have found the circular

design offers many advantages in terms not only of display space but in moving people through such a building. In short, the design is not only architecturally desirable, but also in terms of the uses to which it will be devoted.

ADEQUATE STORAGE AND SERVICING OF STATE RECORDS

Under the law the Historical and Museum Commission is specifically responsible for acquiring, preserving, and making accessible for use the historically valuable records of the Commonwealth. These include not only such treasured documents as the Penn Charter, the provincial frames of government, and records of the Revolution. They likewise contain maps, charts, reports, and correspondence which not only tell the story of Pennsylvania's government, but also the story of its economic, social, and cultural growth. The archives furnishes the indispensable raw material for the history of the Commonwealth, and it preserves records of legal significance and personal interest to individuals and groups.

The care of such records was a matter completely neglected until the establishment of a State Archives Division in 1903, and, even after this desirable step forward, the program has not been properly supported. The present Division of Public Records is crowded into three rooms with insufficient records storage, with no provision for modern facilities and working space for cleaning, repairing, and storing newly received records, and with a staff too small to service properly the records already on hand. It might be added that no significant expansion of staff can be made in the space presently provided the Division.

The new Archives Tower planned for the William Penn Memorial Museum and Archives Building will:

1. Furnish storage facilities for the permanently valuable historical records of the Commonwealth now held and for additions for many years to come.
2. Permit the establishment of an active program of acquiring valuable historical records from other state agencies and from the families of former governors and other state officials.

3. Provide for several decades, in the storage space not immediately required for archival records, an area for a records center to store records not in current use by the creating agency, but which must be retained for set periods of time before final disposal. The space thus provided will be the cleanest, safest, and most accessible records storage possible, and for many years it will make unnecessary the expenditure of additional funds to provide such facilities.
4. Provide relief to agencies crowded for working and storage space because of the accumulation of records. The deposit of the valuable archival records and the temporarily stored records will both help in this regard.
5. Provide safe archival and records storage under optimum conditions of light, temperature, and humidity.
6. Provide space and equipment for cleaning, fumigating, and repairing records before storing.
7. Provide the necessary facilities for photostating and micro-filming of records—services essential both for the users of the archives and for an efficient program of records management in connection with the operation of the records center.
8. Provide adequate office and working space for the archival staff to service the records and to prepare the inventories and other finding media essential to their use.
9. Provide space for a search room, a small reference library, and studies for visiting scholars.
10. Provide adjacent office and working space for the historians in carrying out the program of research and publications—a program designed to discharge the Commission's assigned duty of disseminating the results of historical and archaeological research both by the staff of the Commission and by others.

The Archives Tower has been planned to efficiently serve the functions for which it was designed. Above the ground-floor level, which houses offices and working areas, the tower consists of eighteen unornamented levels with concrete-block walls and concrete floors covered with rows of plain shelving for the stored records. The windowless walls protect the rec-

ords from light and dust and reduce the expenses of maintaining the proper temperature and humidity. The many, low-ceilinged levels permit the storing and servicing of the records without the use of ladders, provide additional rigidity to the building, and help to localize fire, water, or other damage should any occur.