

## *The "Fireproof": The Society's Building*

ON MARCH 18, 1884, ON THE OCCASION of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's first meeting in its new hall at 13th and Locust, President Brinton Coxe observed to the assembled members: "After fifty-nine years of existence, you now meet under a roof which is your own. You are now no longer tenants of another, but proprietors, in your own right, of your own house, on your own soil. The moral and material anxieties connected with a precarious tenure, which were always matters of permanent solicitude, are now at an end."<sup>1</sup> To which Society member Lloyd Smith added: "It has been made without any aid of government."<sup>2</sup> These two themes—not having owned a building for safe storage of its collections and sole reliance on contributions from its members—dominated the first sixty years of the Society's history. Twenty years would pass before any public funding would be expended to support its purposes.

Founded in December 1824 and constituted during 1825 to elucidate the natural, civil, and literary history of Pennsylvania, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania first borrowed a room from the Phrenological Society in Carpenter's Court, then shared use of a small rented room upstairs in the American Philosophical Society for an office and headquarters from 1825 to 1844. After a two-year tenancy in a somewhat larger room, long desired, in another building several blocks away from APS, in 1846 the Society leased a room for fifty dollars a year on the third floor of the Athenaeum's new building on Washington Square. In one of the opening day speeches, Thomas Wharton, a founder of the Society and an Athenaeum member, summarized the Society's reputation at that time:

One of the apartments, immediately over us, is to be occupied by the

<sup>1</sup> *Inauguration of the New Hall of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, March 18, 1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Historical Society; kindred, in some measure, in purpose with ours. This valuable Institution, known to, or at least duly appreciated by, I am afraid, only a small portion of our community, has been in existence for about twenty-two years; and although suffering from penury, both in numbers and in purse, it has done great service to the history and character of our Commonwealth, by the valuable contributions which have enriched its Transactions [publications]; by the republication of scarce tracts; and by the collection and preservation of pamphlets, which might otherwise have perished. The fact that this valuable Society is very inadequately supported; that its narrow income, barely sufficient for the most economical disbursements, is derived exclusively from the small annual contributions of its members, most of them young men and professional persons of very moderate means; that it has no endowments and no capital fund; is, I regret to say, anything but creditable to Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup>

Modest financial resources necessitated small quarters and limited collecting. Formed to collect the materials of history, relocation to the room at the Athenaeum provided increased space for collections when compared to the "small closet" which had been available to the Society at the American Philosophical Society.<sup>4</sup> Ten years after assuming residency at the Athenaeum, an additional room was rented in 1857.<sup>5</sup> In his 1910 summary of the Society's history, Samuel Pennypacker would observe, "Throughout all of the earlier years of the existence of the Society there continued a ceaseless effort to secure a foothold somewhere."<sup>6</sup>

In 1855 the Society initiated a Building Fund but limited its growth by making it subservient to the Publication Fund begun the year before. The members resolved that "it is highly expedient that the Historical Society of Pennsylvania should avail itself from time to time of every opportunity to procure the possession of a building commensurate with its growing

<sup>3</sup> Hampton L. Carson, *A History of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1940), 1: 217.

<sup>4</sup> *History, Biography & Manuscripts*, Pt. 1 of *Catalogue of the Library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1849); cited in Susan Stitt, "The Historical Society of Pennsylvania: The First Forty Years, 1824-1864" in H. G. Jones, ed., *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums and Collections, 1791-1861* (Chapel Hill, 1995), from which this quick history of the Society's early headquarters is drawn. Amplifying details on the history of the Society were found in a speech delivered by Samuel Pennypacker on April 6, 1910, that was published as "The Formal Opening of the New Fireproof Building of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, April 6-7, 1910," in *PMHB* 35 (1910), 257-335.

<sup>5</sup> Minutes, Council of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter, Minutes), June 8, 1857, 771.

<sup>6</sup> Pennypacker, "Formal Opening," 8.



importance and necessities."<sup>7</sup> Subscriptions to the Building Fund would not be binding, however, until a total of five thousand dollars was pledged to it, and then only when the Publication Fund amounted to ten thousand dollars. Even then, the interest from both funds would be used for publications until the Publication Fund totaled twenty thousand dollars. Publications were clearly a higher priority than facilities. There are no references to the Building Fund in subsequent meetings and no chair for that committee is listed among the Society's officers. Adding material to the collection, selecting the annual orator, and publishing his address were the principal activities of the Society during this period.

Not until 1860 did Librarian Townsend Ward report that the subscription "commenced sometime ago, towards a Building Fund, now amounted to more than five thousand dollars, at which named sum the subscriptions became binding . . ."<sup>8</sup> The need for a new building must have been discussed during the 1862 annual meeting, because in the following month the Society's Council agreed to furnish each member of "the Committee appointed on that subject" with a printed "minute of the proceedings of the meeting relating to the erection of a suitable Hall for the Society."<sup>9</sup> It appears that the Council was trying to spur the committee to action. At the 1863 annual meeting, Samuel Hazard, Ward's successor, reflected that "the Library has been accumulating for many years and especially in later years increasing very rapidly, owing in part to a more favorable location, than the Society enjoyed for a long period after its formation . . ."<sup>10</sup> Hazard further observed that

During the past year the accommodation of the Library has been increased by several cases in this room, and considerable shelving in the other; but all are not yet sufficient for a perfect arrangement. Here it may be well to observe, that if the increase of the books continues, larger accommodations will be required. The present rooms when reached are very comfortable, but the effort to arrive at them is almost universally complained of. If rooms in a more central location could be procured farther west and more easy of access, it would induce many to visit them, who are now deterred by this difficulty. But it is time for us to make an effort to procure a building for the Society, in which the books, pictures and

<sup>7</sup> Minutes, 1848, 631.

<sup>8</sup> Minutes, 1859-1870.

<sup>9</sup> Minutes, 1862-1888, March 28, 1862, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes, 1859-1870 (unnumbered pages), Feb. 9, 1863.

museum could be displayed,—a fire proof erected, calculated to accommodate the manuscripts, and arrange them in proper order and safety . . . late statistical information shows the extraordinary losses of books and manuscripts by fire, which have occurred for want of fire proof buildings, which ought to warn us of the danger to which we are exposed, and induce an appeal to our citizens to aid to erect one.<sup>11</sup>

Librarian Hazard referred, of course, to the enormous loss of books and records during the Civil War. Current events must have been a daily reminder of the Society's stewardship responsibilities. By the time Hazard retired in 1864, concern about a building had, apparently, become widespread in the membership. While the tellers were counting the votes for the new librarian, one of the members questioned the Corresponding Secretary: "Why can we not have a hall better adapted to our purposes and worthy of this great state and of the objects for which the Society was created?"<sup>12</sup> The minutes record that this comment "elicited remarks from a number of the members, all advocating the importance of having more room for the display of the library and valuable collections of the Society, in a location more accessible and nearer the center of the present growth of the city."<sup>13</sup> During the March 1864 meeting, the Society formed a committee "to take the subject into charge," apparently replacing the previous committee.

At the Society's June 1864 meeting, the main topic of discussion was how to save the Slate Roof House associated with William Penn. For the first time, a funding goal of \$100,000 for the Building Fund was recorded. The Society celebrated its fortieth anniversary in 1864 with the republication of volume one of its *Memoirs*, which had first appeared in 1826, the first of many publications. In his preface Benjamin Coates, one of the founders, summarized the Society's current state, noting, "For the erection of a fire-proof hall, too, a 'Building Fund' has been commenced, for which twenty-five hundred dollars have been collected, and it is hoped that the obvious need for such a protection may induce the liberal to aid in the

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. This is the first recorded reference to the need for a fireproof facility to protect the Society's collections.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes, Feb. 8, 1864.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



undertaking."<sup>14</sup> Progress toward the Building Fund goal was slow. At the 1865 annual meeting, held on February 13, a report noted that "the Committee had prepared subscription books and an appeal to the citizens of Pennsylvania setting forth the great danger to our valuable records in not having a fireproof building. And recounting the many instances in the history of our country where the original manuscripts belonging to the Archives of different States and public institutions have been irreparably lost by fire, where a little foresight and care would have preserved them to furnish important historical blanks."<sup>15</sup> No subsequent report concerning the response to this appeal exists.

As an alternative the Society tried cooperating with other cultural organizations for a shared facility. A subcommittee was appointed "to meet similar committees from the various Art Literary and Scientific Institutions of the City, for conference in relations to a joint effort for the erection of a building suitable to the wants of the several bodies represented."<sup>16</sup> Only the Academy of Natural Sciences responded to this initiative, but it too came to nothing.

The need to procure a "new hall" became a recurrent theme in the Council minutes, but fundraising lagged. By January 1867 the Building Fund had collected only \$4,000, and the \$273.62 interest earned was, as mandated earlier, turned over to the Publication Fund. In February, Council appointed a committee of five "to take into consideration the propriety of securing more suitable rooms for the Society."<sup>17</sup> Previously, some action had been taken to protect the Society's most valuable collection items. Librarian Richard Eddy reported that "the Manuscripts and other articles of value deposited in the Fire-Proof, remain in the same unclassified condition mentioned in the previous report, with the exception of the Engravings, Maps, & Broad-sides," which were being organized. The location of this fireproof storage area is never identified, but the condition of the materials in the off-site location became an increasing concern. Eddy concluded his

<sup>14</sup> *Memoirs of the Historical Society*, Vol. 1, *Being a Republication* (Philadelphia, 1864), xii. Coates reported the amount collected for the Building Fund; four years earlier Ward reported that \$5,000 had been subscribed, i.e. pledged.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes, Feb. 13, 1865.

<sup>16</sup> Minutes, Feb. 20, 1865. Pennypacker recalled the Athenaeum's initiative in 1832, "a scheme for the different literary and scientific societies in the city to erect an edifice in common . . . We have in this connection the earliest suggestion of a fireproof building." (Minutes, 9).

<sup>17</sup> Minutes, 1862-88, Feb. 25, 1867, 93.

report with a plea for a new building: "I beg leave to express the conviction that the increased growth of the library, & the labor expended in its cataloging & arrangement, ought to incite the Society to renew efforts to secure more ample & more secure accommodations for its valuable possessions."<sup>18</sup>

On April 13, 1868, in his acceptance speech as the Society's president, John William Wallace described the Society as "... not an ancient one. As yet it enjoys no large endowments. It has made no vast impression upon our community, none at least that brings reflected benefits. Yet it is strong. In some senses it may be called rich. It is rich in precious volumes, rich in rare manuscripts, rich in historic portraits and possessions. The admirable catalogue just now made shows the great extent of all. The Society needs only a hall in which to display what it possess."<sup>19</sup> The Committee on New Building, appointed in 1864, had become discouraged, however, and recommended in 1868 that it be discharged. Instead, new members were added. Perhaps these new members identified the constraints on the growth of the Building Fund as a key impediment to action. In 1869 it was still only \$4,000. A note in its annual report explained: "It will be thus observed that this Fund could not be made available for building purposes until the Publication Fund receives about one hundred and forty additional subscriptions and it will therefore be advisable to adopt a different form when the vigorous movement for the erection of a fireproof building now in contemplation shall be carried into effect."<sup>20</sup> Finally, at the annual meeting in February 1869, the membership resolved to double the life membership dues and to reserve the twenty-five dollar increase for the Building Fund and to annul previous restrictions on it. These decisive actions appear to have given momentum to the endeavor.<sup>21</sup>

In November 1869 Councilor John Jordan Jr. reported that the Building Fund Committee had secured a building formerly used for a school house on the east side of Sixteenth, near Locust Street. With the Building Fund now totaling \$10,000 in gifts and subscriptions [pledges], the Society's members authorized the committee to purchase the lot for \$7,500. In December, Jordan reported that the title papers were being prepared, "but, that some

<sup>18</sup> Minutes, Jan. 14, 1867.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes, April 13, 1868.

<sup>20</sup> Minutes, Jan. 11, 1869.

<sup>21</sup> Minutes, March 8, 1869.



time yet would be required to perfect them."<sup>22</sup> In April 1870, Jordan reported that the deeds were prepared, "but the settlement cannot yet be made."<sup>23</sup> Frederick D. Stone, secretary of the Building Committee, later reported that "the informality" in the title to the property Number 221 South 16<sup>th</sup> Street thwarted the Society's long intended purchase of that site; the matter was in an attorney's hands.<sup>24</sup> No further mention of this site appears. Even as the committee experienced this disappointment, members learned of the availability of the building in which, from 1817 to midcentury, the Pennsylvania Hospital had exhibited Benjamin West's painting *Christ Healing the Sick in the Temple*. Designed in the Gothic style by Charles A. Busby in 1816<sup>25</sup> and known as the Picture Building, it was situated on the south side of Spruce Street, between 8th and 9th Streets, on the hospital grounds. The College of Physicians had leased it from 1854 to 1870 for library and meeting space. The Society's committee held informal meetings with a committee from the hospital's board of directors and drew up agreeable terms for a ten-year improvement lease at nominal rent, after which it would revert to the hospital.<sup>26</sup> The Council appointed a new committee to follow through with the leased quarters,<sup>27</sup> and in April 1871 expenditures from the Building Fund were authorized for improvements to "the new Hall of the Society on the Hospital grounds."<sup>28</sup> Settling the unfinished business of the prior Building Committee, completing additions and improvements to the Picture Building, and moving the Society's collections took a year.

At the relatively young age of thirty-six, architect Addison Hutton served as a non-Council member on the committee appointed in 1870 to examine and plan renovations for the South 16th Street property. When that purchase failed to mature, Hutton continued to serve on the committee and

<sup>22</sup> Minutes, Dec. 13, 1869.

<sup>23</sup> Minutes, April 11, 1870.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes, Dec. 27, 1870.

<sup>25</sup> Charles A. Busby, *Elevation of the Building, Erected at Philadelphia, to Receive Mr. West's Picture*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Collections (hereafter HSP Cols.).

<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey A. Cohen, "Addison Hutton: Alterations to the Picture House, Pennsylvania Hospital, for the Historical Society of Pennsylvania," in James F. O'Gorman et al., *Drawing Toward Building: Philadelphia Architectural Graphics, 1732-1986* (Philadelphia, 1986), 130.

<sup>27</sup> Minutes, Dec. 27, 1870.

<sup>28</sup> Minutes, April 24, 1871, 186.



Fig. 1. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania at 820 Spruce Street ("Picture House"). Photo, c. 1880s. Penrose Picture Col., HSP.

designed the renovations for the Picture Building. His rough sketches of two schemes for remodeling the facade and adding wings to the Picture Building are dated June 3, 1871. Finished elevations were probably done for both, though only the one not adopted survives in the Society's collection; it shows a brick structure reminiscent of the Academy of Music in its detailing.<sup>29</sup> The Society selected the Gothic design, which could be added to the existing structure with economy, adding a projecting entrance of brick with white marble sills and wings (fig. 1).

A spirit of celebration pervades the January 22, 1872, minutes: "Meeting

<sup>29</sup> "One of the plans submitted for Altering Picture House for use by Historical Society," HSP Cols. During his lengthy career, from 1857 to 1910, Addison Hutton would design all but one of the renovations and buildings commissioned by the Society.



of Council, Athenaeum Building, 3<sup>rd</sup> story, 219 So. 6<sup>th</sup> St.<sup>30</sup> This fulsome heading had never been used before; this was the Council's last meeting in the "old hall." One can imagine the gusto with which Council ordered drafted and printed the following circular:

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania  
No. 820 Spruce St. Philadelphia

We have the pleasure to inform you that the Historical Society of Pennsylvania has removed its library, collections and offices, to their new Hall, No. 820 Spruce St. which at present is to be open for members, their families and friends, until the first of May next, from 10 A.M. till 2 P.M. and in the evening from 7 till 10 o'clock.

As the undersigned were the committee appointed twenty five years ago to notify the members of the removal to the Athenaeum Building, it has been deemed proper that a fact so interesting should appear on the minutes of the Society in the emphatic form of their continuance as a Committee again to notify the members of a removal which is hoped may be followed by a still greater increase of prosperity.

John Jordan, Jr., William Duane, John T. Lewis, Committee

In March 1872, a Society publication described the "new hall":

The rooms have been arranged excellently for their purposes. There is a vestibule eighteen feet wide on the lower floor, and immediately in the rear a room twenty feet by twenty-six, having on each side other rooms twenty feet square. On the right side of the vestibule there is a fireproof room, ten feet by twenty, for the deposit of heavy articles of value, while opposite this on the left side rises the staircase leading to the second story. . . . The second floor of the building consists of one long room, running from east to west, a length of sixty-eight feet, and from north to south in the centre, about forty-two feet. It is this width over the vestibule and entry below, and over a bay window eighteen feet wide and six feet deep on the south side. Beyond the lines of these the room is twenty feet wide. The space occupied by the fire-proof below is also taken up by one above. These have both double iron doors, iron shutters to their windows, are fitted up with shelving and drawers, and have full ventilating properties. The

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

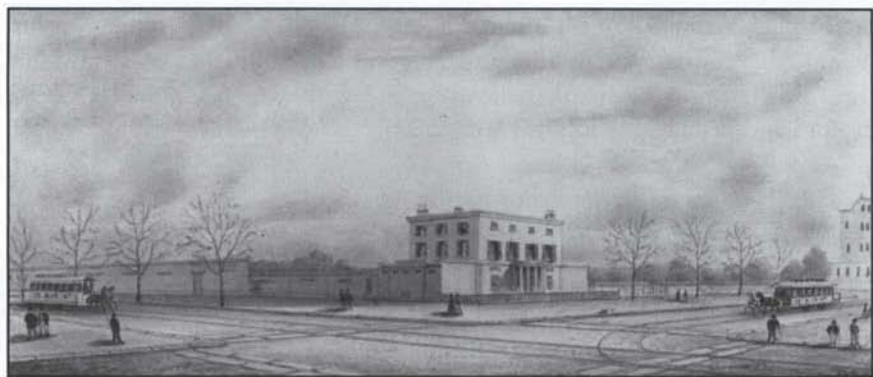


Fig. 2. Benjamin Ridgway Evans, Patterson Mansion. Wash drawing, 1870. HSP.

fire-proof chamber up stairs is intended to contain valuable manuscripts, &c., &c. The ceiling of the library proper is eighteen feet high.<sup>31</sup>

The Society prospered in this location during the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, when America's history captured the public's imagination. One of the highlights of this period was the founding of the American Library Association in the Society's reading room in 1876. Two paintings, a photograph, and a print document the picturesque exterior and interior of the Society's new hall and the regard with which it was viewed.

The Society's increased visibility in the new hall apparently stimulated many gifts to the collection. Only seven years into the lease Council minutes mention the importance of having "a building sufficient for the proper accommodation of the library and collections already accumulated."<sup>32</sup> Again, the balance in the Building Fund of \$15,000 and its annual interest of "only a little more than \$200" become matters of concern. That this was more than the usual complaint and that some thought had been given to a new building is suggested by this note: "At the usual estimate of \$3. each [per square foot], for 2000 [square feet] there would be required \$60,000 for a building." And

<sup>31</sup> *Miscellaneous Publications of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, vol. 2, as quoted in Carson, *History*, 1: 360.

<sup>32</sup> Minutes, Feb. 24, 1879, 429.



Fig. 3. Rear of Patterson Mansion, showing gardens and greenhouse. Photo by Gutekunst, Philadelphia, 1883. Society Prints. HSP.

even this, the minutes conclude, would not provide for "future increase."<sup>33</sup> Apparently, no new initiatives were undertaken to address these concerns.

Four years later, on November 21, 1882, Treasurer Charles M. Morris, "announced the object of the meeting to be the consideration of an offer of sale to the Society of the property on the South West corner of Locust and Thirteenth Streets."<sup>34</sup> A committee was appointed to confer with the owner, Francis Stokes. The next day a special Council meeting convened to hear the report that Stokes had offered the Society "the privilege to purchase the same [property] for fifty thousand dollars on or before February 1, 1883." Stokes also pledged "to contribute two thousand dollars to the Fund to be raised for the purchase of the property."<sup>35</sup> Council moved to set a goal of \$50,000 for subscriptions to the Building Fund, noting that about \$20,000 more would be needed for alterations, furniture, and other expenses.

Francis Stokes is identified by the city directory as a lumber merchant in partnership with his brother, James C. Stokes, who lived at 1310 Walnut Street. As a member of the Society, Stokes was well aware of its desire to own a building; he attended meetings during the late 1860s when this

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, 514.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 516.



concern was a frequent matter of discussion. He characterized his offer as a privilege because the property consisted of the house<sup>36</sup> and part of the lot previously owned by General Robert Patterson, hero of three wars: the War of 1812, the Mexican War, and the Civil War. Patterson died in August 1881 at the venerable age of 89.<sup>37</sup> During the almost half century of the general's residency, the house, its ample gardens, and two greenhouses had become well known in Philadelphia (figs. 2, 3). Patterson entertained frequently and broadly, his guest list including legions of military heroes and elected officials, noted figures in the arts from Charles Dickens to his neighbor Fanny Kemble, and Philadelphians from many circles. Society members John Jordan, Jr., Thomas Balch, and Townsend Ward were remembered as guests.<sup>38</sup>

A block away from Broad Street and the Academy of Music, the Patterson property met the criterion long expressed by the Society's

<sup>36</sup> The dwelling has been of interest to historians because it was built for John Hare Powel (1786–1856), soldier-statesman-agriculturist-author (see *Dictionary of American Biography* 25: 143) and attributed to the noted Philadelphia architect William Strickland (1788–1851). Powel purchased the lot from Edward Shippen Burd early in 1832 (Deed Book No. AM22, p. 398). In May of that year Powel wrote, "I am about to build an house 60 feet by 44 feet on Locust between 13<sup>th</sup> and Juniper . . . I shall place myself in the frontier and although my friends condemn me for leaving the fashionable part of town I am satisfied in having two hundred, 250 feet at the cost of 40 feet near the house of Mrs. Powel on Chestnut St. My objective will be mainly frustrated if the lot which is opposite to mine should fall into improper hands or be continued for a longtime in the population of persons who now occupy it as a board yard . . ." (Powel to W. Baring, May 7, 1832, in the John Hare Powel Papers, HSP Cols.). In my opinion, the association with Strickland as architect is circumstantial and cannot be documented with certainty. Powel appears to have defaulted to the original property owner; in the February 1835 transfer of the deed from Burd, not Powel, to General Robert Patterson was recorded (Deed Book No. AM 72, pp. 146–148). The 1836 auction of Powel's household furnishings lists new, never-used carpets, rugs and bedding, which suggests that Powel never lived in the house. These comments are based on B. Kevin Hawkins, "Historical Survey of the Property on the Southwest Corner of Locust & Thirteenth: Once the Site of the Mansion of John Hare Powel," unpublished paper, 1985, deposited in the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

<sup>37</sup> Mrs. Lindsay Patterson, "The Old Patterson Mansion, the Master and his Guests," *PMHB* 39 (1915), 94. His granddaughter would later recall the public viewing in the house: "the sad procession continued to file by without interruption till it was time to close the doors for the funeral services." Patterson's funeral march proceeded with full military honors to Laurel Hill Cemetery with Generals U. S. Grant, W. T. Sherman, Winfield Scott Hancock, and Fitz John Porter among the pallbearers. Concerning the history of the dwelling, Mrs. Patterson believed that the General purchased it in 1834 from Powel. Adding to the mystery of its architectural origin, she notes "The unusual style of architecture of the mansion, the shape of the letter E, was accounted for by the fact that it was originally three structures thrown into one . . ." 82. The odd floor plan of the mansion, which included an interior chimney, seems to support her assertion.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

members that its headquarters be closer to the center of the city. Additionally, the property was located in a neighborhood that already had two libraries and other educational and nonprofit institutions: the Philadelphia Library (Library Company of Philadelphia),<sup>39</sup> on the northwest corner of Locust and Juniper; the Episcopal Academy on the southwest corner of Locust and Juniper; the Universalist Church of the Messiah, on the northeast corner of Locust and Juniper; the Library of the College of Physicians on the northeast corner of Locust and Thirteenth; and a grammar school on the northeast corner of 12th and Locust.<sup>40</sup>

By January 30, 1883, the Building Committee reported "the satisfactory information that the entire sum of Fifty Thousand dollars has been subscribed, all of which was accomplished in the short time of about seven weeks."<sup>41</sup> In addition, the committee obtained refusal rights for \$12,500 to purchase an additional lot adjoining the Patterson property on Locust Street. Councilor Samuel Pennypacker moved to accept Stokes's offer to sell both parcels to the Society and on February 1 the entire property was purchased. It appears to have been a private sale, for the property moved directly from Robert Emmet Patterson and other heirs of the general to Francis Stokes and then to the Historical Society.<sup>42</sup> On March 6, Robert E. Patterson expressed "the gratification of the family in knowing that their old home, itself to some extent historical, has come into the possession of the Historical Society." (fig. 4)<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> *Inauguration of the New Hall, 1884*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> G. W. Bromley, *Atlas of Philadelphia*, vol. 1, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> Wards (Philadelphia, 1885), Plates O and J.

<sup>41</sup> Minutes, 1862-1888, 526.

<sup>42</sup> Stokes's deed to the property was recorded on Jan. 22, 1883, in Deed Book No. JOD74, p. 538; the Society's from Stokes on March 9, 1883, Deed Book No. JOD88, p. 433. Francis Stokes purchased the entire block between 13th and Juniper, Locust and Irving Streets. Following the sale of the large lot with the Patterson Mansion, Stokes sold nine house lots on Locust and on 13th in 1883. Houses were built immediately on 13th, but the first one on Locust that appears to have been occupied was 1320 Locust. All of this construction occurred at the same time as the Society's hall, west of the mansion. This information is drawn from research by Jeffrey A. Cohen, "The Architect of 1320 Locust Street," unpublished paper, 1988, for the Library Company of Philadelphia.

<sup>43</sup> Robert E. Patterson to S. Kingston McCoy, March 6, 1883, letter entered in the Council Minutes April 23, 1883. Patterson wrote to clarify that the mantelpieces in the house were a gift from the family to the Society and to express the wish that they "remain where they are so long as the building may stand." Subsequently, he added "The property was sold without the mantels they having been especially reserved in the 'agreement of sale.' When it was found that the Historical Society was about to purchase the mansion, these mantels were then given up, so that the Society, and not the person to whom we sold,





Fig. 4. Interior looking west, Patterson Mansion, HSP. Photo by Julius F. Sachse, June 24, 1889. Society Col. HSP.

A committee was formed "to make the necessary alterations and improvements of the property . . . to select and appoint a competent person to superintend the execution of all contracts . . . [and to] report to Council for its approval the preliminary plan of alterations and additions."<sup>44</sup> Chaired by Edwin J. Eisenbrey, the committee reported to Council at the March 31 meeting with two plans for alterations and improvements drawn by Addison Hutton. The plan selected proposed erecting a new building to the west of the mansion, in the location of Patterson's conservatory, and constructing a fireproof storage area on the northeastern corner (fig. 5). The plan shows that lavatories were installed where the Patterson kitchen had been located,

should possess them and the deed was made with that agreement understood, so that practically they are a gift from the family to the Society."

<sup>44</sup> Minutes, 1862-1888, 526.



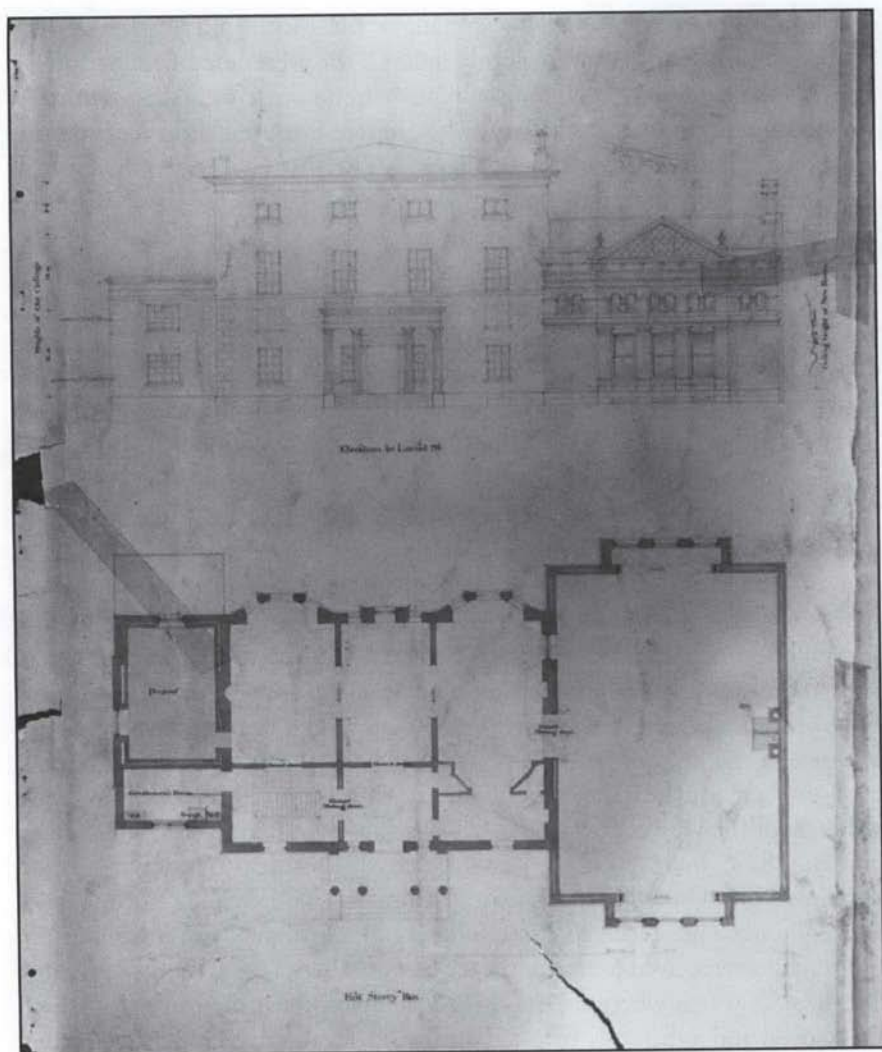


Fig. 5. Plan of Patterson Mansion, showing Assembly Hall on right and fireproof addition of Gilpin Annex on left. Addison Hutton, 1883. Hutton Col., HSP.

on the Locust side of the fireproof, men's rooms in the basement and on the first floor and a ladies' on the second floor. The adjacent "fireproof" had a cement floor, iron inside shutters, and a cast iron cantilever for the

surrounding gallery reached by a stair at the south end of the room.<sup>45</sup> Hutton's plan for the new assembly hall, on the west side of the mansion, also shows stairs to a gallery, but a handwritten note says "gallery omitted" and another note adds "the gallery to be omitted from this proposal but bolts will be built in to secure a future gallery."<sup>46</sup> The plans called for the floor of the new assembly hall to be built at the same level as the existing structure; a twenty-one-foot ceiling was specified.

At the end of May 1883, Lewis Haven was selected as the builder of the western addition for a negotiated sum of \$9,928, which was \$407 less than his low bid for the work. That difference may have been the expense of the facade, because the Building Committee had contracted with Haven for a plaster finish on Locust Street. In reviewing the contract in June, Council directed "that a pressed brick front, in conformity with the [Hutton] plan adopted by Council at the meeting of March 31, 1883, be substituted for the plaster front as contracted for by the Building Committee."<sup>47</sup> Construction was already underway when this decision was made; building continued through the summer. In September the Building Committee was asked to report on "the amount already expended and now under contract for the several buildings at 13<sup>th</sup> and Locust Streets."<sup>48</sup> This is the first reference in the Council minutes to "buildings"—plural—under construction, because the fireproof storage area being added to the eastern end of the mansion was an expense of the Gilpin Trust.

Long a member of the Society, Henry D. Gilpin (1801–1860), an 1820 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, was admitted to the Philadelphia bar in 1822, but he never practiced law. President Andrew Jackson appointed him United States District Attorney at Philadelphia in 1831, and, subsequently, he received two federal appointments in Washington. Commissions received for his advocacy of a number of large claims under the Mexican War treaty became the "broad foundation for the resources which he enjoyed and judiciously invested during his life and which he bequeathed

<sup>45</sup> *Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Additions to Hall, SW Corner 13<sup>th</sup> and Locust Sts, Basement, 1<sup>st</sup> Storey and Gallery Plan, Cross Section and Three Elevations*, sheet 2, Addison Hutton Col., HSP.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, sheet 3. "Drawings referred to in my agreement with E. T. Eisenbery, Chair of the Building Committee, June 1883."

<sup>47</sup> Minutes, 552. In addition to probably costing less, a plaster facade would have matched the exterior of the mansion. The aesthetic reason for selecting a distinctly more modern appearance was not given.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 555.

in ample benevolence at his death."<sup>49</sup> Gilpin served on the Council in the 1840s and as vice president from 1857 until his death on January 29, 1860. His will (January 17, 1860) provided a third of his assets, after the death of his mother and wife, to fund a charitable trust, which would—after its principal had appreciated sufficiently—provide income for the erection of a "fire-proof Library building, to be part of a fire-proof Edifice of the [Historical] Society," to house Gilpin's "entire library of books and manuscripts." The dates of Gilpin's will and of his death are critical because, under applicable law, bequests to charities recorded within thirty days of the benefactor's death were void. The Register of Wills proved Gilpin's will on February 3, 1860. The topic of his intended gift became the subject of a lengthy negotiation between the Society and the Gilpin heirs. Following his mother's death, Gilpin's widow died on February 12, 1874. By December 7, 1874, all interested parties entered an agreement to provide a portion of the charitable bequest, but less than the amount originally specified, to the Historical Society for the purposes stated in the will. Another two years would pass before Orphans' Court confirmed the trust by a decree dated October 28, 1876. The resulting Trust for the Gilpin Library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania was authorized to lease fireproof space from the Society with the income of the trust and to cover the cost of operating the library, including staffing. The Gilpin Trust constructed the 1883 fireproof addition to the Patterson mansion and leased collection storage space annually from the Society. It became an important pillar of financial support for the Society.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Carson, *History*, 1: 410. Quotation attributed to Joseph Ingersoll, with whom Gilpin studied law. Noted diarist Sidney George Fisher wrote of Gilpin, after reading the proceedings of the Historical Society on Gilpin's death, "The speeches were good, tho of course rather too favorable, and the whole affair creditable to the Society and to the person who gave occasion for them. We have not many men here worthy of commemoration and therefore a good deal of fuss is made over one whose claims were by no means of the highest order, tho certainly respectable." Nicholas Biddle Wainwright, ed., *A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years 1834-1871* (Philadelphia, 1967), 348. In 1860 Gilpin's widow Eliza had printed *A Memorial of Henry D. Gilpin* (Philadelphia, 1860). See Carson, *History*, 1: 408.

<sup>50</sup> The Trustees of the Gilpin Trust were members of the Society's Council, but the funds were separately accounted until the Orphans Court Decree of September 25, 1992, which granted the Society's request to commingle the Gilpin Trust in the Society's endowment for general support. (Gilpin Trust for the Library of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Orphan's Court, No. 2124, 1976). At this writing, the Gilpin Library Trust represents approximately one percent of the Society's unrestricted endowment.



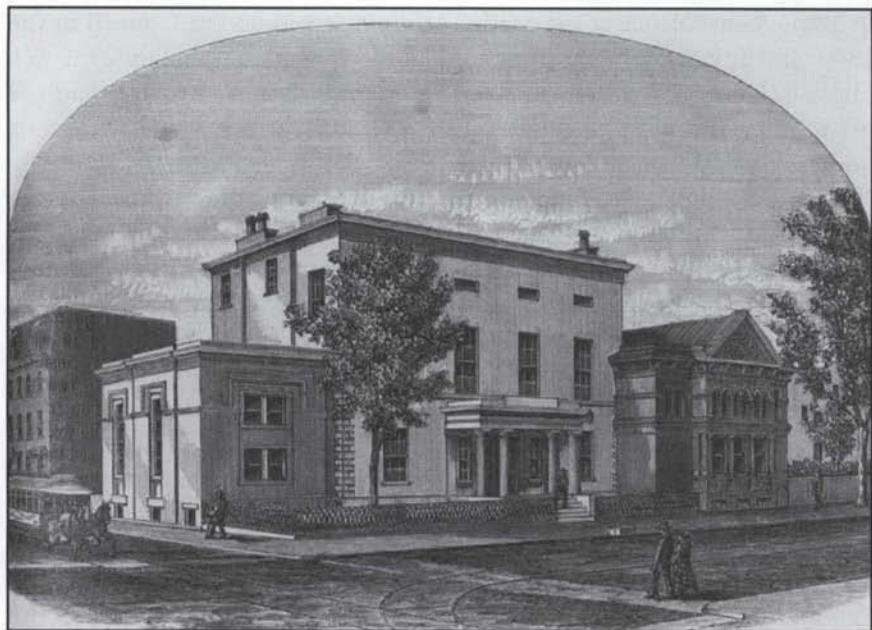


Fig. 6. "New Hall of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania," showing new Assembly Hall on right and Gilpin Annex on left. From Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia* (1884), 2:1221.

In the pamphlet produced for the opening of the new facility on March 18, 1884, the additions and improvements are described (fig. 6):

The general features of the mansion have been but little changed. The western wing has been removed, and where it stood, and on the adjoining ground, a spacious hall, 45 by 70 feet, has been erected for the meetings of the Society. The wing on the east has been rendered thoroughly fireproof. Its internal measurement is 16 by 37 feet. It is surrounded with a gallery, and affords ample space for the most valuable portions of the Society's collections. The doorways between the parlors on the first floor of the main building have been enlarged, so as to make the rooms, which are used as reading rooms, virtually one. The handsome marble mantle pieces have been retained. The upper portion of the building will be used for the storage



Fig. 7. Interior of New Assembly Hall, HSP. Photo, c. 1885. Society Col., HSP.

of books and other articles of interest.<sup>51</sup>

New President Brinton Coxe greeted the large assemblage of members with enthusiasm on the evening of March 18:

I congratulate you upon this most auspicious occasion. You have been invited here to-night to take possession of your new home, and to inaugurate it as the Hall of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. After fifty-nine years of existence, you now meet under a roof which is your own. . . . The laborious and able services of your Building Committee have organized a building, or, rather, system of buildings, worthy of an Academy of History. The old mansion has been rearranged as a library and adapted to the wants of

<sup>51</sup> *Inauguration of the New Hall, 1884, 2.*

students and readers. On the one side is this spacious assembly-room for your meetings for public lectures; on the other is a fire-proof building for our manuscripts and other historic treasures and for archives which have been confided to our custody by public authority. The hall of the Historical Society is now worthy of a representative public institutions.<sup>52</sup>

In closing, Coxe noted the sad irony of the death of President John William Wallace just as the long-awaited new hall was nearing completion. His last visit had been an inspection tour, and Coxe reported that Wallace had been entirely satisfied with the buildings. "The fact that the Society had now a permanent domicile relieved his mind of the anxieties, which he had felt for years, upon the complicated dangers of an inopportune change of location."<sup>53</sup> The security of ownership compared with its previous vulnerability—even under a sympathetic landlord—was a milestone for the Society.

Following addresses by Professor John B. McMaster, on the importance of historical societies to a full understanding of the past, and by Hampton L. Carson, on the importance of the Constitution, Lloyd P. Smith, librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia, congratulated the many individuals whose contributions had made the new buildings possible. Smith noted: "Pennsylvania, as a State, does not recognize its Historical Society, and Philadelphia as a corporation has never taxed its citizens one dollar to build it up."<sup>54</sup> He praised not only the building but also its location:

The edifice is not only larger and better adapted to the needs of the Society than the old one, but the situation is better, and I congratulate the Library Company whom I have the honor to serve, I congratulate the students of Philadelphia and elsewhere on the fact that the Philadelphia Library, the Historical Society, and the College of Physicians—the best medical Library, with one exception, in the country—are now all within a stone's throw of each other. The Law Library will doubtless soon move to Broad Street, and then four of the most important libraries of Philadelphia, each one supplementing the other, will be close together.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 2–3.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 14. The Law Library did not move to Broad Street, but later to City Hall. The Library Company, which moved the majority of its collections from Locust Street to its new building on South Broad Street in the 1870s, moved back to the block in 1965.



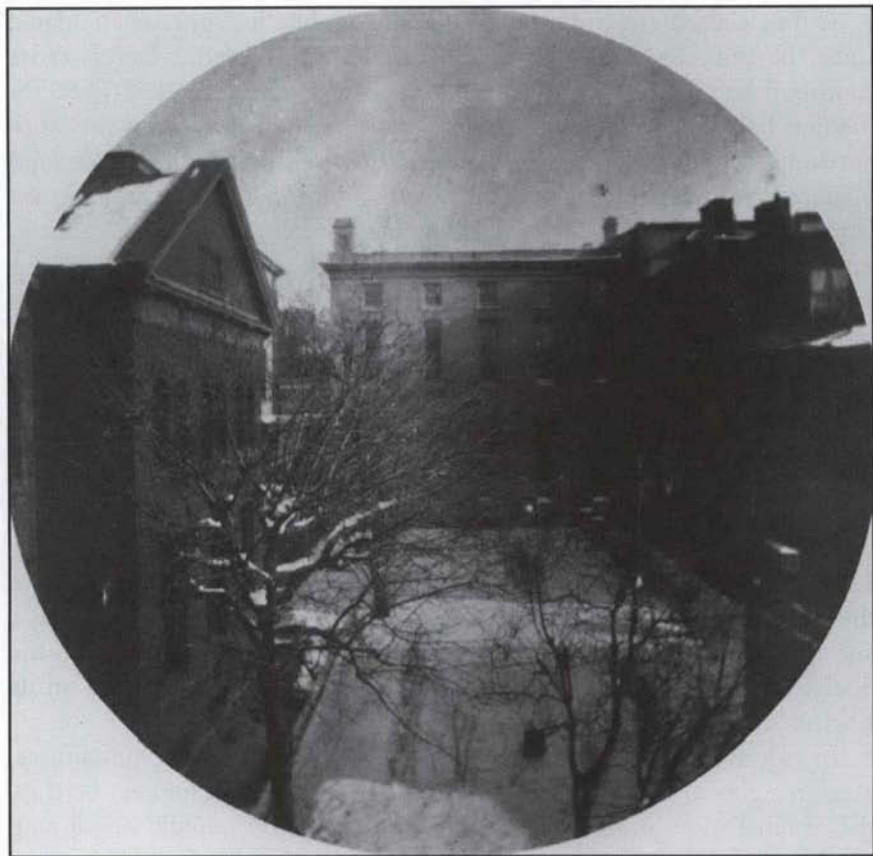


Fig. 8. Rear of Historical Society, showing west wall of Jordan Annex and the back of the 1884 Assembly Hall. Photo, May 14, 1892. Society Photo Col., HSP.

Ten days later the chairman of the Building Committee moved that, as a finishing touch, "the title of the Society be inscribed in appropriate gilt letters over the portico, and that the old silver plate bearing the name of the Society, formerly used at 820 Spruce Street, be put on the front of the door of new hall of the Society."<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Minutes, March 24, 1884, 582. Perhaps the silver plate was stolen from the door for, sadly, it cannot be located in the Society's institutional archive.

A financial statement in the inaugural pamphlet lists gifts accumulated since the Building Fund was initiated in 1855, but credits largely those contributions made during the last two years with amassing \$89,071.99 for the new hall. The statement refers to an estimated \$2,000 "for work yet to be done" to construct secure exhibit cases to display rare books and manuscripts, and concludes with the note that \$8,396.72 is the "amount yet required."<sup>57</sup> On April 2, 1884, Building Committee Chairman Eisenbrey, submitted a full typed report to the Council, attaching 188 vouchers totalling \$95,910.91. Physically and financially, the new hall represented the largest capital investment in the Society's history (figs. 7, 8).

Within the decade that investment increased. In 1886 Librarian Frederick D. Stone reported that the lot west of the auditorium was available for purchase for \$13,000. It consisted of twenty-five feet on Locust Street, extending back to Irving Street. Joseph E. Temple, retired dry goods merchant and generous patron of several institutions, pledged \$5,000 toward the purchase and the owners of the lot discounted the price by \$2,000. President Coxe and Stone were named a committee of two to raise the remaining \$6,000 in subscriptions,<sup>58</sup> which was accomplished in ten days, and the purchase authorized.<sup>59</sup> The fence separating the new lot from the Society's garden was removed, and the lot was graded and fenced on its Locust Street frontage.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to the usual business of authorizing all expenditures, accepting gifts to the collection, and approving nominations for membership, the Council now monitored the Historical Society's rapidly developing neighborhood. In 1888, for example, a committee was authorized "to take such measures as they may deem best to prevent the running of an elevated railroad on 13<sup>th</sup> Street past the property of the Society."<sup>61</sup> It also considered undertaking further construction. The February 1889 Council meeting opened with the secretary reading a letter from Senior Councilor and Vice President John Jordan, Jr.:

Gentlemen:

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 616.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 617.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 622.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 645.

About 1841 I was one of those who subscribed for the purchase of the first book case needed by the Society. From that time I have watched with interest the growth of the Library, and notwithstanding the spacious quarters now occupied by the Society, feel convinced that in a very short time it will need additional space for the proper storage of the books that are being constantly added to its collections. I long ago resolved that, whatever I should do to promote the interests of the Society, I would endeavor to do during my life-time, and I now wish to provide for the contingency I have spoken of.

After consulting with your Librarian regarding the most suitable place for the erection of such a building as will be needed, I directed him to have plans prepared that will be submitted to you. They provide for the erection of a fire-proof building on the 13<sup>th</sup> Street front of the lot in the rear of the Hall. It is to be so constructed that the entire building can eventually be used for the storage of books, but, for the present, the second floor can be used for the display of objects of interest belonging to the Society, as I believe such an exhibition, in safe quarters, will attract other collections.

The plans are subject to your approval, and any alterations you may suggest, that do not involve additional cost, will be considered. When everything is decided upon, I propose to deposit with the Treasurer of the Society and the Trustees of the Library Fund the sum of fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000)—the estimated cost of the building—to be used for its erection. . . .

This was the largest outright gift ever made to the Society; accordingly, the Secretary was directed "to communicate the thanks of the Society to Mr. Jordan for his munificent gift."<sup>62</sup> By resolution, the building was named for its donor and became known as the Jordan annex. Regrettably, Jordan died the following year.

At a special meeting of the Society held in the hall on Monday evening, April 28, 1890—his memorial service—John Jordan, Jr. (1801–1890), was lauded as a member of fifty years, who, "with the exception of the Presidency, which he positively declined to accept, as Vice-President, member of the Executive Council, Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary, Trustee of the Publication Fund, of the Library Fund, of the Gilpin Fund, of Endowment Fund, . . . has filled almost every official

<sup>62</sup> Minutes, 1889–1904, Feb. 25, 1889, 4–6.



position in the Society."<sup>63</sup> Jordan was, undoubtedly, the unnamed person described by President Brinton Coxe in his remarks during the inauguration of the Hall, only six years before:

Nearly sixty years since, this Society was planted like an infant colony in a new continent. . . . The delicate plant has now become a strong healthy tree, under whose shade we are gathered together. It is tonight, therefore, the first of our duties to remember, with heartfelt gratitude, benefactors, whose care, wisdom, and devotion have guided an association depending upon a small number of supporters to the independent condition of a representative public institution.

Few, very few, of that devoted band are with us tonight to survey with mingled feelings this scene amid the gratitude of their fellow-members. But I cannot trust myself to dwell upon this subject, lest I be guilty of indiscretion; for one of these survivors is that venerable member whose paternal care of this Society, during long years, commands the filial obedience of us all. That obedience compels me to refrain from an expression of gratitude, which his delicacy of feeling has ever shrunk from receiving. . . .<sup>64</sup>

Although he was a leading banker and philanthropist,<sup>65</sup> Jordan was a modest person who declined public acknowledgment of his generosity. He did not want to be recognized at the opening of the Hall that he helped to purchase, nor was he present at the Council meeting in 1889 when his gift of a wing was announced.

The Council appointed Librarian Stone and Treasurer J. Edward Carpenter to handle the contract for the building and to supervise its construction.<sup>66</sup> They awarded the contract to Jacob Myers for \$10,589, anticipating that such extras as heating would increase the cost to \$13,353.<sup>67</sup> This is the only Society building not specifically associated with architect Addison Hutton. No plans or elevations have been found, only its

<sup>63</sup> Minutes, Special Meeting, April 28, 1890, printed memorial glued into minute book, unpaginated.

<sup>64</sup> "Inauguration of the New Hall . . . 1884," 4.

<sup>65</sup> "It is an interesting fact, that the last act performed by Mr. Jordan's right hand before it was paralyzed, was to write a bank-check, as a gift to the Women's Guild of the Century Club of Philadelphia." This footnote to Dr. James J. Levick's memorial address cannot be omitted from this account because Jordan chaired the Bankers Committee which enabled Philadelphians to use bank checks for commerce and for philanthropy.

<sup>66</sup> Minutes, 1889-1904, 8.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. During this period, a builder was just that, the firm that constructed the structure. The owner contracted separately for plumbers, painters, et cetera.

dimensions: 42 x 23 feet. The "thoroughly fireproof" wing was two stories high. The second floor, with its 21 ½ foot ceiling, was a gallery

devoted to the exhibition of manuscripts and rare works and pictures. The first floor is divided by an open iron floor, making two stories, each seven and one-half feet high. On these two floors between thirty and forty thousand volumes can be stored in shelves. When more room for books may be required, the upper story can be divided into three floors similar to the lower floor. The total capacity of the stack will be between seventy-five and one hundred thousand volumes. No change is proposed to be made on the upper floor before another fire-proof building is prepared for the choice and rare collections of MSS. and books. It may, perhaps, be properly stated here, that when Mr. Jordan joined the Society its library numbered fifty volumes; today it numbers thirty-five thousand.<sup>68</sup>

It is probable that the Council's great trust in Jordan and Librarian Frederick Stone obviated the need for an architect or for lengthy discussion by either a committee or the Council. The question as to whether to electrify the Society's building, however, required its own committee, doubtless owing to fear of fire. The Committee on Electric Light offered a resolution in December 1889 recommending "that the electric current for the purpose of lighting shall not be introduced into the building, without a formal resolution of the Council."<sup>69</sup> When, a month later, the decision appears to have been made to electrify the building, the firm responsible for the work, Walker and Kepler, was required to furnish a Board of Underwriters certificate of approval before being paid. The Edison Company (referred to as the Electric Light Company in the minutes) was laying the underground "circuit" in the area. Council resolved that when electricity came to Locust Street, arrangements must be made to allow the current to be shut off from the building if desired.<sup>70</sup> Installation must have been delayed, however, because in September 1893—over three years later—Librarian Stone

<sup>68</sup> Minutes, Special Meeting, 1890, unpaginated. When in 1903 the staff was asked for their recommendations for renovations and a new building, it was noted that the Jordan annex had not been completed, but was lacking two of the originally intended floors. The additional book stacks were never built, but the Jordan stack appears to have been rebuilt to the second floor during the 1905 renovation and, in 1921, outfitted with metal shelving by the Van Doren Company. HSP archives, photograph collection.

<sup>69</sup> Minutes, 1889–1904, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 24.



recommended that electric light not be introduced into the building "on account of the expense," and the Council agreed."<sup>71</sup> Three years later electrification was still being debated: "The question of introducing electric light into the Gilpin and Jordan fireproofs and the cellar was discussed" and referred to the Committee on Hall and Buildings.<sup>72</sup>

During this period the Society closed during the summer months and used this time for repairs and improvements. In June 1896, "shelving old fire proof" was on the list of work to be done.<sup>73</sup> Reporting on the work completed in the summer of 1897, John C. Browne reported for the Committee on Hall and Buildings that "the putting in of the electric light, which was authorized by Council, had not been accomplished owing to press of business."<sup>74</sup> It had taken almost a decade to make this decision. Electricity was a new source of energy and the Society's Council very carefully considered its safety. When, however, electric Welsbach lights were installed in the large hall, they were considered such a success that additional fixtures were authorized in January 1898.<sup>75</sup>

The Council minutes clearly distinguish between the two fireproof buildings and the rest of the Society's facility. During its February 1899 meeting, Council resolved to appoint a committee "to take into consideration the making fireproof of those parts of the buildings of the Society which are not . . ."<sup>76</sup> The committee's initial recommendation, made at the April meeting, was to remove "the heating and cooking appliances from their present positions to a separate building." They also recommended purchasing the two stables immediately south of the Society.<sup>77</sup> This purchase was not made. The committee remained quiescent for the next two years. Concern about the potential for fire in the Society's buildings continued, however. At the March 1901 meeting, three councilors were appointed Trustees of the Building Fund responsible for soliciting members to contribute money to extend "the capacity of the present Hall of the Society by building on the vacant ground to the West and South of the same, or portions thereof, and by enlarging the present buildings . . ."

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 190. The practice of closing during the summer continued until 1976.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 338-39.



In view of the large increase in recent years of the collections of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, whereby the accommodations therefore have become greatly crowded, and the safety of many of its books, manuscripts, pictures and other valuable property imperilled by their being necessarily placed in those portions of the Hall which are not fireproof, and whereby also the growth of the Society's collections and its usefulness and work are likely to be restricted in the future, it is the sense of the Society that the time has arrived for the taking of steps to add to and extend the capacity of its present buildings, and to render them completely fireproof.<sup>78</sup>

Judge Pennypacker, now president, made the motion for full Council approval, just as he had in 1883 concerning purchase of the Patterson Mansion. Pennypacker, William Brook Rawle, and Thomas G. Morton were the Building Fund Trustees; Gregory B. Keen, curator, acted as secretary for the Building Fund Committee (hereafter referred to as the Building Committee), which left a careful record of its deliberations and decisions. At its first meeting, on January 15, 1902, Dr. Morton was authorized to confer with Addison Hutton, "architect of portions of the building of the Society."<sup>79</sup> Only seven days later Hutton "appeared before the Trustees with plans for future building" (fig. 9). The following week the committee discussed the plans and "a form of appeal to the public," meaning the Society's members and friends. Moving with dispatch, the committee invited Hutton to appear at the next Council meeting on February 5 and again on February 11 to discuss his plans. By this time, word must have spread that the Society was about to embark on a building project. Keen notes in the committee minutes for February 26: "Communications were read from C. E. Schermerhorn, Newman Woodman & Harris, and A. W. Dilks, architects, offering their aid in supplying plans for a new building and alteration to the old one."<sup>80</sup> There is no indication that any architect other than Hutton was considered.

Simultaneous with discussions of building renovations, the committee considered drafts for an appeal to the members for funding. Keen was dispatched to interview Mrs. Charles Stille and to review the draft with her.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 338-39.

<sup>79</sup> Minutes of the Meetings of the Trustees of the Building Fund (hereafter, Minutes BF), unpaginated.

<sup>80</sup> Later, in October 1903, Edgar V. Seeler, architect, also wrote to the committee. *Ibid.*

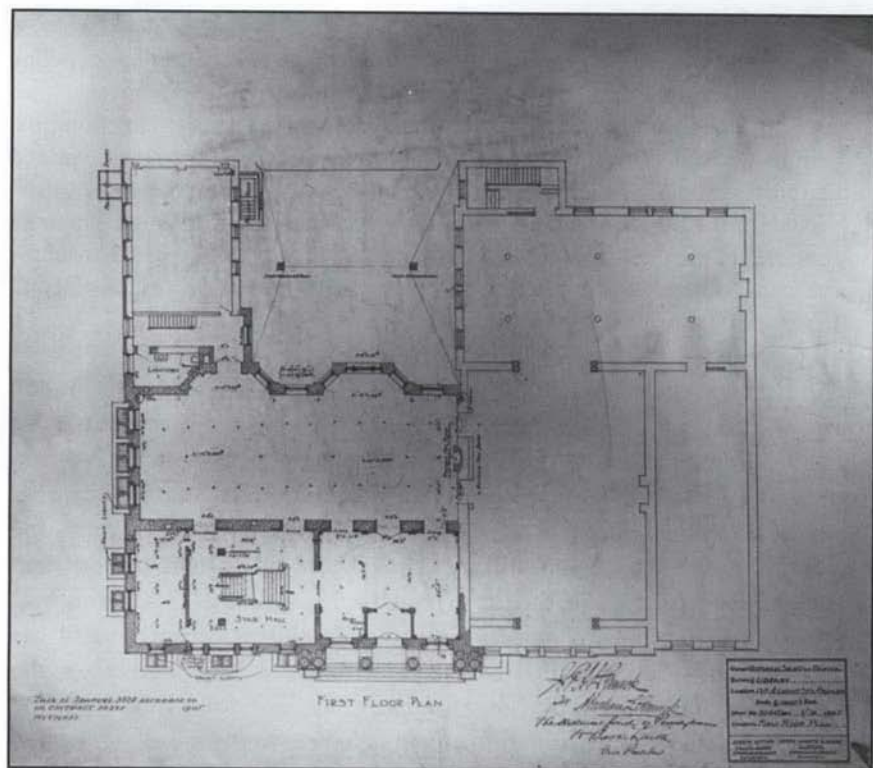


Fig. 9. Plan of HSP showing 1904 addition. Addison Hutton, 1904. Hutton Col., HSP.

Dr. Charles J. Stille (1819–1899), professor of history and belles lettres at the University of Pennsylvania, where he also served as provost from 1868 to 1880, had served as president of the Society from 1892 until his death in the summer of 1899. The Building Committee wished to mention in the appeal Dr. Stille's bequest of a third of his estate, following the death of his wife, "for the purpose exclusively of erecting an additional building for its library and collections and appurtenances." Following that diplomatic editorial review and—apparently—Mrs Stille's approval of the text, the committee completed its draft of the appeal:

Dear Sir:

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania is about to take a very important step. Its invaluable and constantly growing collection of books, manuscripts, portraits, etc., in many lines unequalled by that of any other institution in the world, imperatively demands enlarged accommodations. The entire available space in the present structure is so crowded that proper facilities for the examination and consultation of these original sources of historical information cannot be afforded. . . . The new work and the old, extended and improved, must be of the best modern construction and absolutely fireproof, since much of the material intrusted to the care of the Society is of priceless value, and, once destroyed, its loss would be irreparable. Such reconstruction and addition will demand an outlay of about two hundred thousand dollars. Towards the accomplishment of this object[ive], a distinguished President of the Society, the late Charles J. Stille, LL.D., made a most liberal bequest, and we hope for the cordial encouragement and financial support of other members and friends of the Society. . . .<sup>81</sup>

The committee authorized a printing of 3500 appeals, subscription cards, and envelopes addressed to Trustees of the Building Fund. By the December 26 meeting of the Building Committee, thirty-eight persons had subscribed \$8,020 for the building.

The pace of contributions apparently did not meet the committee's expectations. By February 23, 1904, only nine additional subscriptions had come in. The committee decided to appeal to Andrew Carnegie and Rawle prepared the letter. The period from 1893 to 1923 has been called "The Golden Age of the American Public Library" due to "Andrew Carnegie's grants to construct 1,698 public library buildings—25 of them in Philadelphia."<sup>82</sup> The minutes do not record a reply. Another strategy for obtaining the needed funds suggested itself. The chairman of the Building Committee was the newly elected governor of the state, Samuel Pennypacker. "The propriety of appealing to the Legislature of the Commonwealth for aid was discussed and being agreed to, Mr. Rawle was requested to submit the matter to the Council of the Society for their approval and such action as they deemed best." On February 24, the President of the Council appointed a committee (apart from the Building Committee) chaired by John F. Lewis. Upon Morton's death a month later,

<sup>81</sup> "New Building for the Historical Society of Pennsylvania," *PMHB* 26 (1902), 469.

<sup>82</sup> Emanuel Kelly, AIA, and Mary Ellen Yuhas Hagner, "For the Common Good: Carnegie Libraries," *Philadelphia Architect*, October 1998, 6.



Lewis was appointed to fill his position on the Building Committee.<sup>83</sup> Described as "indefatigable, irrepressible and not to be misled,"<sup>84</sup> John Frederick Lewis was Philadelphia's premier admiralty lawyer, active in civic affairs, having served, for example, as president of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. A councilor of the Society from 1902 to 1907, he would serve as a vice president from 1907 to 1929 and as president from 1929 to 1932.

The appeal to the state was the Society's first attempt to attract public funding. Although earlier dedicatory speeches boasted that no state or city support had ever been received, none had been requested. With no experience in the public forum, the Council was well aware that in 1903 it had special access in Harrisburg because of Pennypacker. It is quite possible that Pennypacker himself—avid historian, collector, and author of numerous histories—recommended this strategy in the best interests of the Society. He would have been aware that, at this time, the Society was proposing a union of historical societies in Pennsylvania and had developed an organizational structure to support the activities of the many newly formed county historical societies. Although there is no further mention of this ambitious scheme, it may in fact have been Pennypacker's idea.

As could have been predicted, the Society's appeal for financial aid went smoothly. The minutes of the May 25, 1903, Council meeting begin:

To the President and Council of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania:  
Gentlemen:

The Committee on Legislative Appropriations have the honor to report that the Bill hereto attached was passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor, appropriating \$50,000 to the Society as stated in the Bill. The Committee suggest that a note of thanks should be sent by the Secretary to the Hon Henry F. Walton and the Hon John M. Scott for their assistance in having the bill passed. These gentlemen did every thing in their power in behalf of the measure, and Mr. Walton personally appeared before the

<sup>83</sup> Minutes, 1889–1904, 411.

<sup>84</sup> Pennypacker, *Formal Opening*, 26. With a generational symmetry typical of Philadelphia and to historical societies, John Frederick Lewis's grandson, Howard H. Lewis, served as Board Chair of the Society during the 1997–99 renovation of the Fireproof Building superintended by his grandfather ninety years earlier. Similarly, Weld Coxe served as chairman of the Building Committee for the 1997–99 renovations; his great-grandfather, Brinton Coxe, was president of the Society when the New Hall at 13th and Locust was inaugurated in 1884.

Legislative committee and advocated an appropriation to the Society.

The funding for a fireproof building was offered on the condition that plans for the structure, contracts for its construction, and sureties that the Society had sufficient funds to complete the project be filed with the auditor general of the Commonwealth. Completion of the project had to be guaranteed at the outset; the state appropriation along with gifts from the Society's members had to cover the total expense.

To oversee execution of fundraising, design, and construction, the Council appointed the Committee on Fireproof Building, composed of the Building Committee and four additional members. It was charged with appealing to the Society's members for contributions and "to the carrying out" the objective of such funding, including plans and specifications and the completion "of such fireproof buildings."<sup>85</sup> At the October 18 meeting of this new committee John F. Lewis was elected chair. After discussion, doubtless to orient the new members, it was unanimously resolved that "it is the sense of the Committee that a connected plan of the entire building proposed to be erected and altered for the Society should be prepared, showing a continuous and uniform facade and that the work of creation and alteration shall proceed as funds may be provided without interfering with the working of the Society, if such interference can be prevented." The committee asked the librarian and curator to write their views about the interior arrangement of the building and Addison Hutton to "loan" the plans he had drawn for this project eighteen months earlier. On October 27 the two senior staff members presented their views: make the Jordan annex into a bookstack, remove the lecture hall, and construct a three-story fireproof building. Keen (curator) began his list with "maintain Patterson Mansion intact," while John Jordan (librarian) assumed preservation of the mansion (fig. 10). Noting his association with the Society for thirty years, "as Secretary of the Council, Corresponding Secretary, Councillor, and Assistant Librarian," Jordan spoke from experience in observing

An increase in the additions to the library and collections has followed every improvement in change of location and enlargement of building made by the Society, the greatest during the occupancy of the present building. There is

<sup>85</sup> Minutes, May 25, 1904, 420-24. Henry F. Walton was State Representative for the 24<sup>th</sup> District of Philadelphia; John M. Scott was State Senator for Philadelphia.



Fig. 10. HSP staff. From left, John W. Jordan, librarian; Jane C. Wylie, assistant in charge of manuscripts; Laura C. Stiles, *PMHB* indexer; Gregory B. Keen, curator; Martha F. Grant, assistant to Dr. Keen; Albert J. Edmunds, cataloguer. Photo on back porch of Patterson Mansion, 1903. Society Portrait Col., HSP.

no reason to apprehend any change by the contemplated improvement.

The rooms on the first floor of the Patterson building and that of the new building should be connected and an unbroken vista from the east wall of the former building to the west wall of the latter building would enable the librarian and his assistants to have a better control of the books and better provide for their safety as well as permit a more efficient service. It would also be more economical, as no material increase of assistants would be necessary.

Both staff members recommended that steps be taken to provide improved housing for the newspaper collection "fast deteriorating from the lack of proper storage." Jordan suggested that the Committees on Library and Collections and Hall and Buildings should visit libraries in Boston and New York with him before adopting final plans. As the meeting adjourned, Chairman Lewis "outlined a plan for the proposed building which had



occurred to him, and promised to elaborate it more fully at a subsequent meeting . . ."

By the November 9 meeting, Lewis had explained his ideas to Hutton, who had drawn up plans. After the committee discussed them, Lewis suggested that the librarian and curator study them as well. By the November 23 Council meeting, committee chair Lewis submitted plans for a "proposed new building and alterations of the present one." After review and discussion, Council adjourned without taking action.<sup>86</sup> By November 30, Hutton had altered the plans according to suggestions made during Council's discussion. On December 2, 1903, "on occasion of the annual dinner of the Officers of the Society in commemoration of the Founding of it," Lewis displayed the plans. By December 14, some defining decisions had been made "embracing buildings on the vacant ground to the west and south of the present assembly hall." The ceiling height in the westernmost and southern halls would be the same as that of the Patterson mansion—fifteen feet. A stairway would be placed south of the southern hall, but there would not be a stairway in the western hall. Hutton's 1883 hall had a wide bay protruding on Locust Street; covering this structure with a continuous facade would create an alcove on either side of the windows. Everyone agreed that one of the alcoves would be used for an elevator,<sup>87</sup> the other for a stair. The question of whether to have structurally supporting columns in the southern hall appears to have generated great discussion. It was finally agreed to have six columns.

The Committee was of the opinion that by doing so greater strength and stability would be secured for the building, additional stories could be added with great ease and the columns would not be architecturally offensive and would lead to a radical reduction of the expenses as against building without columns, money being saved in structural iron work. . . . It was also resolved, that hard red brick should be used for the building, Pennsylvania marble keystones or capstones for the window heads and a granite base below the first story windows.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Minutes, 442.

<sup>87</sup> Twenty-five years later, in November 1928, the Otis Elevator Company installed an electric passenger elevator that cost \$5,300 in the northeast alcove. The elevator shaft, machinery room and penthouse were constructed by Herbert H. Conway, a builder "recommended as reputable by the architects, Savery and Scheetz," for \$3,228. (Minutes, Jan. 1923–April 1929, 341–42, 343, 366.)

<sup>88</sup> Minutes, Committee on Fireproof Buildings (hereafter, Minutes FP), Dec. 14, 1903, unpaginated.

On January 4, 1904, the plans for the new building were discussed and finally agreed upon. At a special meeting of the Council called for January 11 to hear the committee's report, Chairman Lewis submitted a set of preliminary drawings prepared by Addison Hutton for a building to extend from 13th Street to the westernmost portion of the Society's property, covering the lot purchased in 1886 with a stack of single entrance collection storage vaults. Council unanimously resolved to employ Hutton "to receive bids from builders for the erection of a new building in substantial accordance with the plans submitted." The resolution authorized phasing of construction, "the bids to be divided so that the Society may proceed with a new building of an 'L' shape upon the westernmost lot and part of the areaway south of the present hall, or with a new building including the 'L' and also a structure over the main hall as may subsequently be decided. . . ."<sup>89</sup> Strategically, this resolution enabled the Society to satisfy the state's completion requirements by phasing the full renovation/construction project in two completely separate buildings.

Hutton accepted the contract and met with the committee in February and in early March to review detailed plans and specifications. During its March 28 meeting, Council approved final detailed plans. These plans included building over a portion of the alley leading to Irving Street, a portion that was enclosed by the fence on the south side of the Society's property; that too was approved with the provision that the position of the fence be photographed.

By the committee's next meeting on April 19, Hutton had received eleven construction proposals. The committee decided not to act on them but instead requested proposals including removal of the "old roof and ceiling, fireproofing the floor of the assembly hall and placing two Fire Underwriters doors between it and the Patterson mansion." Essentially, in fireproofing the old Assembly Hall, the Society had to demolish it. J. E. and A. L. Pennock were awarded the contract for the erection of the new building at the April 25 Council meeting, with the provision that the fireproofing be done within their original bid and that the main assembly room be completed by September 15, the entire building by January 1, 1905. The committee reported to the Council during its May 23 meeting that the Pennocks had

<sup>89</sup> Minutes, Jan. 11, 1904, 448-50.



agreed to these terms. At four o'clock on May 24, a "formal exercise of breaking ground" with an "appropriate order of exercise" was held.<sup>90</sup>

As work on the hall continued, the Fireproof Building Committee continued to meet in order to resolve specific issues. In July they discussed methods of heating and lighting. They agreed to use hot water heat and to prepare the new building for gas and electric lighting. Furthermore, the committee decided to eliminate "the wooden arches and all wooden material in the assembly hall" and substitute fireproof materials. Later that month they approved plans and specifications for the heating and lighting. By mid-August a portion of the wall had been erected and the front brick work was approved. On August 30 Mr. Savery, of Hutton's office, attended the committee meeting by invitation.<sup>91</sup> The steel frame was raised during September and October (fig. 11). By October 11, the inspector of the iron and steel work reported to the committee that, as of that day, "the first, second and third floors of the Historical Society Building are now completed as far as the steel structure goes and the work done meets with unqualified approval. . . ." Construction did not completely divert the committee's attention from raising the funds needed. "A draft of an appeal to members and friends of the Society for funds to complete and furnish the building was submitted by the chairman."

Information on the building's finishing details crowd the minutes of these meetings. For example, during the November 9 meeting, \$175 was authorized for fifty-three 12 x 14 inch black japanned registers and \$150 "for reconstructing [a] large chandelier for [the] assembly hall with thirty electric lights."<sup>92</sup> On November 18, for the first time, the words "new Assembly Hall" are used. On November 21 the committee considered adding galleries to the assembly hall, inspected the building, and viewed the test weight placed on a section of the floor. At meetings on November 25 and 28, the committee authorized building the assembly hall galleries and accepted

<sup>90</sup> Minutes, 469, 471, 472. The Historical Society has the ceremonial shovel that broke the ground that afternoon, but no record of the ceremonial exercise has been located.

<sup>91</sup> In 1903 just after he completed plans for the Bucks County Historical Society, Hutton was joined in his partnership by his nephews Albert and Addison Savery and William Scheetz; they assisted in the completion of the HSP building.

<sup>92</sup> Over the generations since 1904, the Society has discarded very few of the furnishings and fixtures purchased for the Fireproof Building. Unfortunately, the eccentric electrified chandelier was discarded, but its spaceship-like light bulbs are a focal point of all of the assembly hall photographs until the renovation in 1975.





Fig. 11. Construction of new Locust Street facade for Assembly Hall. Photo, September 15, 1904. Society Photo Col., HSP.

Pennock's estimate for the ornamental plaster in that space. Also on November 28, the committee reported to Council that "The Robling Construction Company, the contractors for the fireproof flooring of the building have almost, if not entirely, completed their work."<sup>93</sup> The report

<sup>93</sup> Minutes, Nov. 28, 1904, 486-87; typed report attached to minutes.

explains that at least twenty-eight days had elapsed since the cement and cinder concrete had been poured. A fifteen square-foot panel of the second-story floor of the west hall was given a 9,000-pound dead-weight test for several days. The test, supervised by the architect, proved entirely satisfactory.

The "Robling Construction Company" was one of several firms owned by the Roebling family. John A. Roebling's utilization of wire rope for suspension bridges is an engineering legend, while the earlier story of his development of this strong new material in 1841 to improve canal car safety in Pennsylvania is not well known.<sup>94</sup> The market for wire rope expanded rapidly towards the end of the nineteenth century when it was used for mechanical power transmissions, in the Otis brothers experiments with elevators, and in marine markets. Ferdinand Roebling, John A. Roebling's second son, operated the New Jersey Wire Cloth Company, utilizing excess capacity for fine wire. As Washington A. Roebling remembered in an unpublished manuscript written in 1919,<sup>95</sup> "As time went along we consoled ourselves with the delusion that the wire-cloth business must be continued in order to consume the extra output of the wire mills."<sup>96</sup> "To retrieve the low price of cloth and chicken netting, William Orr, superintendent of the New Jersey Wire Cloth Company, introduced the use of stiffened wire lathing for fireproof partitions and walls—a very good thing. This was the new era of fireproof buildings."<sup>97</sup>

Why was this the era of fireproof buildings? The devastation caused by fire during the Civil War and later in the Chicago Fire (1871) created

<sup>94</sup> Hamilton Schuyler, *The Roeblings: A Century of Engineers, Bridge-Builders and Industrialists, the Story of Three Generations of an Illustrious Family, 1831-1931* (Princeton, 1931). *The Roebling Story: As Told in 1941 on the 100th Anniversary of the Founding of the John A. Roebling's Sons Company* (New Jersey, 1941), a pamphlet published by the company. Kathryn E. Harrod, *Master Bridge Builders: The Story of the Roeblings* (New York, 1958).

<sup>95</sup> This manuscript, "An Inside View of a Great Industry," forms Chapter 28 of Schuyler's *The Roeblings*.

<sup>96</sup> Schuyler, *The Roeblings*, 335.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 352. John A. Roebling's Sons Company was listed in the 1905 Philadelphia city directory as providing electrical supplies at 140 North 10th Street, but from 1910 until 1945, the company was identified as selling wire and wire rope. Located at 1416 Land Title Building, the "Roebling Construction Company, fireproofing" was listed in the 1905 Philadelphia City Directory, not identified with a specialty in the 1910 directory, and not listed in the 1915 directory. Interestingly, a John A. Roebling, probably a grandson of the company's founder, was a member of the Society prior to his resignation in March 1906; accordingly, the Building Committee and its architect could have learned of this fireproofing method directly from a family member.

increasing concern. Even the newly built high-rise steel-frame buildings of 1890s were vulnerable. Any fire above approximately 125 feet was beyond the reach of ordinary fire extinguishing apparatus. Incombustible building materials were essential. Burnt clay products, such as hollow tile blocks, began to be used for fireproofing purposes in the 1870s, Portland cement concrete in the 1890s. After an elaborate series of tests comparing the Roebling system of fireproofing with hollow tile blocks, New York City changed its building code in 1896 to permit the use of wire lath and cinder concrete for fireproofing.<sup>98</sup> In an 1898 article in *The Polytechnic*, A. L. A. Himmelwright, a civil engineer and the chief builder for the Roebling Construction Company, wrote: "In the highest class of fire-proof buildings, all woodwork and other combustible material is carefully excluded. All openings in exterior walls are provided with fire-proof shutters and doors. The interior finish in such buildings is wrought in stone, cement, plaster, metal or glass."<sup>99</sup>

The specifications for the Society's fireproof building met these criteria. The floors were made of cinder concrete, using these proportions: one part high-grade Portland cement, two parts clean sharp sand, and five parts steam ashes, reinforced by flat bar stock centered according to the Roebling method. These incombustible materials produced a concrete that was light, porous, and of ample strength.<sup>100</sup> The cinder concrete was covered by two inches of regular concrete so that the floors when finished would be smooth, even, and pleasant to walk upon (fig. 12).<sup>101</sup> The Smith Warren Patent Windows used for the Society's building were metal frames and sash with wire glazing. They were manufactured by the Meade Roofing and Corning Company, located on Filbert Street. All doors were metal covered. All of the trim consisted of plaster, concrete, or metal except for the mahogany handrails on the stairs. The floor plan divided the building into three zones separated by thirty-inch thick solid brick walls and sliding metal pocket

<sup>98</sup> *Tests of the Roebling System of Fire-proof Construction Illustrated with Drawings, Photographs, and Sketches* (New York, 1899).

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>101</sup> Minutes, Nov. 28, 1904, 468-87, typed report attached to minutes. Messrs. Eastwick and Geschwind were the contractors for the cement flooring. It is interesting to note that cement flooring, with grooved control joints like those at HSP, is enjoying a resurgence in popularity owing to its relatively low cost, ability to incorporate radiant heat, and its beauty when tinted, sealed, and waxed.





Fig. 12. Mixing and pouring concrete floor at HSP. Photo by C. S. Bradford, September 27, 1906.

doors held by fusible links.<sup>102</sup> While the Locust Street facade is red brick ornamented with Pennsylvania blue marble, the non-street facades were laid in yellow silica brick, a more reflective and fireproof material. Careful attention was paid to every detail that would contribute to making the building fireproof.

It is easy to imagine the pride with which Frederick Lewis reported on behalf of the Committee on Fireproof Building to the Council on April 24, 1905:

... the Committee feel gratified at being able to report to the Council that the

<sup>102</sup> One of these fusible links is preserved and visible in the doorway between the open stacks in the south hall and its extension on the west.

inspector, after having examined the building from the roofing to the cellar, said that it was the most perfect fire-proof building of which he had any knowledge in this portion of the country, and that there was nothing to compare the building with except the new building now being erected by John Wanamaker at Broad and Market Streets.<sup>103</sup>

But the building had not been completed on January 1 as specified. The addition of the galleries had not been authorized until November. Lewis's typed report to Council (December 27) noted: "The work on the new building has been progressing satisfactorily, but slowly. A sudden spell of cold weather froze the plastering of the ceiling in the main hall and injured it considerably, but the loss thereof will fall upon the Contractors and not upon the Society."<sup>104</sup> In January, Lewis reported to Council "that the work on the building has been progressing during the past month, but there have been quite a number of delays and the building will not be ready for occupancy until Spring. . . ." Among the highlights of his report, Lewis notes:

Work on the gallery is progressing. Its fire proof floor is laid and also the iron work and railing finished on the west side and the work nearing completion on the east. . . . We have authorized door ways to be cut through the alcove walls on the north side of the galleries at an expense of \$62. The heating apparatus, the hot water system is being installed. . . . While the lack of funds necessitates the building being completed in the plainest possible manner, yet the Committee believe that the work being done is thoroughly substantial and workmanlike in every respect.<sup>105</sup>

Finishing details, such as the repair of the plasterwork, continued to be approved by the committee from December through March. For example, on February 1, 1905, the committee agreed "that the iron finish around doorways be painted cream white"; that "new brackets be inserted in the Assembly Hall instead of the four old ones formerly there"; and that "four pendants be introduced under the galleries for electric lighting alone and not be combined with gas." By March 20 the architect was "requested to ask the contractor to notify him when they are ready to turn over the building to the

<sup>103</sup> Minutes, Jan. 3, 1905–Dec. 1913, April 24, 1905, 13–14.

<sup>104</sup> Minutes, 1889–1904, 491.

<sup>105</sup> Minutes, Jan. 3, 1905–Dec 1913, 3.



Fig. 13. View of Historical Society of Pennsylvania, showing completed 1904 addition (right).

Committee." On April 25, Lewis could finally report to Council:

Since the last meeting of the Society, work on the new building has been progressing and the builders seem to have finally vacated the building and have certainly removed their superintendent. At any rate, the Committee have entered upon the premises and have had erected in the main hall and in the southern hall the old walnut book cases belonging to the Society, as far as it has been possible to do so. The cases in the main hall have been already filled with books and many pictures hung. The Committee are receiving estimates for steel book cases for the galleries. . . . The electric wiring is now complete throughout the building and the electric fixtures in place and the current turned on, a contract having been signed with the Edison Electric Light Company for the minimum service at an expense of \$4.62 per month. The hot water heating apparatus is at work and has been for about three weeks so that the building is rapidly drying out . . . scrub women have been



engaged to clean the building down. (fig. 13)<sup>106</sup>

The *Philadelphia Press* printed a photograph of the new building, taken from the west, with the headline "New Building of Historical Society Ready for Formal Opening to Public." The article noted that the formal opening, to be hosted by Governor Pennypacker and the other officers of the Society, would be held the next evening. After explaining the need for the structure, the commentator added his aesthetic judgment of the building:

Owing to the great accumulation of documents and other things of historical interest which were piled up in the rooms and basement of the older portion of the building, the new structure was sadly needed. It was also deemed a necessity to have a building that was fireproof. . . . The new front, however, is not much in keeping with that of the old Colonial residence to which it has been added. In fact, it has been freely dubbed a monstrosity of architecture by neighbors and others who have witnessed its erection. A much more appropriate structure, with equal utilitarian value, could have been put up at an equal cost, it is commented.<sup>107</sup>

Such publicized criticism of the appearance of the new structure would lead to very careful consideration of the plans for the second building.<sup>108</sup>

Meanwhile, the committee had not neglected its responsibility to solicit the funds needed for the project. During the October 1904 Council meeting, the treasurer reported that a total of \$40,000 had been received from the Commonwealth in three payments, which were probably intended to match private funds raised.<sup>109</sup> In November, appeals were sent to the hereditary societies that maintained close ties with HSP. In December, as was the Society's custom, a collection agent was retained to collect subscriptions to the Building Fund in return for a 5 percent commission on all funds obtained. That same month Lewis told the Council "that the committee deemed it advisable to appeal to the Legislature of the Commonwealth for an appropriation of \$150,000 to complete the building." The Council

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>107</sup> *Philadelphia Press*, April 26, 1905 (Perkins Collection, 57, HSP).

<sup>108</sup> In October, another newspaper described the facade as "glaring new brick." Unidentified newspaper photograph (Perkins Collection, 54, HSP).

<sup>109</sup> Minutes, 1889-1904, 483.

approved the motion. In March 1905, "the chairman reported [to the committee] that a letter had been sent to members of the Society and subscribers to the *Pennsylvania Magazine* and the Publication Fund requesting them to write to members of the State Legislature in favor of the passage of a bill appropriating \$150,000 to the Society for the erection of a new building." He noted that a "pamphlet setting forth the value of the collections of the Society and its need of a new building had been sent to members of the State Senate and would be sent to the members of the House of Representatives at the proper moment." This ten-page document was signed by James T. Mitchell, president of the Council. After listing specific items in the Society's collections for seven pages and noting that the Society's priceless collection included many county records and "doubtless many of those of the State itself," Judge Mitchell exhorts, "The duty and importance of preserving this collection from the danger of fire can not be over-estimated." He describes the part of the new building that has been erected and the plan for its completion:

. . . and though the new building will be as plain and severe as due regard to economy required, it will be dignified and imposing, and as absolutely fireproof as the most recent experience can suggest.

The old Patterson homestead which adjoins the part of the building now nearing completion, and in which the Society's collection is now preserved, should at once be fireproofed. . . . Should a fire start in it and gain any headway, its destruction would probably be complete with the loss of its contents.

The Historical Society is entirely without funds to complete the building which the State's appropriation has commenced. It has already incurred an indebtedness of about \$6000, in the confident belief that the Legislature will pass an appropriation bill, enabling it to complete its building and thus provide ample and fit accommodations for the exhibition and storage of its collection. The Society feels that its application to the Legislature for assistance, is not only within the lines of propriety and justice, but is a pressing duty which the Society owes to the State, and whose performance ought not to be further neglected or delayed.

In closing, Mitchell notes, for the record, that the Society is open to all:

According to the Society's By Laws, it is distinctly provided, that all respectable and well behaved persons, whether members of the organization or not, shall be permitted to examine and use the books and manuscripts, and

attend the lectures which are being constantly given under the Society's auspices. Its work necessarily commends itself to all thinking men. Guidance for the future is best based upon the experience of the past.<sup>110</sup>

On April 25 the Council learned that a bill appropriating \$100,000 to the Society for the two fiscal years beginning June 1, 1905, "for the purpose of improving the real estate of the Society and making additions thereto," had passed the Senate and House of Representatives of Pennsylvania.<sup>111</sup> A month later, Council learned that Governor Pennypacker had signed the bill into law.<sup>112</sup>

Within a week of learning that the second bill for state support had passed both houses, the committee agreed "that Mr. Hutton be employed as architect for the building to be erected as a commission of 2 ½ % on the terms of the former agreement on condition that he contribute \$750 towards the Building Fund and the Committee reserve the right to submit his plans to an expert as to artistic features at the expense of the Society." After accepting an amendment that Hutton's "contribution" be \$1000, the motion was passed.<sup>113</sup>

After the support from the Commonwealth was assured, discussions about raising additional funds diminish, although references to the need to economize abound during the design development for the second, larger portion of the building. Everyone was well aware that Dr. Stille's bequest would be a major gift to the Building Fund. Council minutes for September 1906 note the death of Mrs. Anna Welsh Stille, his widow.<sup>114</sup> At the November meeting the treasurer announced receipt of Stille's bequest of \$10,000 to endow a position.<sup>115</sup> In October, the Society received the \$39,663 bequest for the building.<sup>116</sup> By 1910, when the final report on the Building Committee's fundraising efforts was presented, the Stille bequest had appreciated to \$41,600. It represented almost double the \$21,700

<sup>110</sup> James T. Mitchell, *An Address in Behalf of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania . . . To the Members of the Senate and of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1905), 8-10.

<sup>111</sup> Minutes, 1889-1904, 12.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>113</sup> Minutes, FP, May 1, 1905.

<sup>114</sup> Minutes, 1889-1904, 112.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.



contributed by the Society's members and friends. By including the Society's \$126,201 investment in its land and buildings (prior to renovation and construction), this report credits the Society with \$189,501, the Commonwealth with \$150,000. The Committee on Fireproof Building had, however, exerted considerable effort to complete the structure within that total expenditure of \$339,501.<sup>117</sup>

Discussion of building plans, which had begun with Hutton on a preliminary basis as soon as the bill passed, proceeded apace. During its May 22 meeting the Committee resolved to retain the Jordan annex but to demolish the Gilpin Fireproof. In June Chairman Lewis was authorized to consult with the architect about the third floor of the Jordan annex; the floorplans would later show that an apartment consisting of a living room, kitchen, pantry, chamber, closet, and full bathroom was built there to provide staff accommodation for overnight security of the building and maintenance of the boilers.<sup>118</sup> As before, Chairman Lewis reviewed the plans for the new building with the staff: Dr. Jordan, librarian; Miss Leach, assistant librarian; and Gregory B. Keen, secretary and curator.<sup>119</sup> During that 1905 summer, while the Society's entire collection was being moved from the Jordan Annex, Gilpin Fireproof, and the Patterson Mansion, every detail of the interior of the new building was reviewed. The placement of waterclosets, urinals, a coatroom, and a wine room in the basement were determined. The placement of the stairway to the third and fourth floors was changed from its suggested position, over the grand stair from the first floor, to the back of the main second-story front room, and slate, rather than marble, was selected for the steps.<sup>120</sup> At an unusual July 18 meeting, Council approved plans submitted by the committee. Prior to that action, Chairman Lewis presented a letter from G. W. & W. D. Hewitt [prominent architects] containing their opinion of Hutton's designs: ". . . these preliminary sketches exhibit a building which will be architecturally harmonious with the new building already erected on Locust Street and admirably suited for a library and Historical Society (fig. 14). We are of the

<sup>117</sup> "Formal Opening of the New Fireproof Building," 278.

<sup>118</sup> This security apartment remained in use until the late 1970s.

<sup>119</sup> Minutes, FP, July 25, 1905.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 1, 8. The grand stair from the first floor was located in the exact position of the stairway in the Patterson mansion. In 1914 General Patterson's granddaughter would describe "the tripartite stairway in the centre of the building" (of the Patterson mansion) as "an inexplicable squandering of space." Patterson, "Old Patterson Mansion," 83.

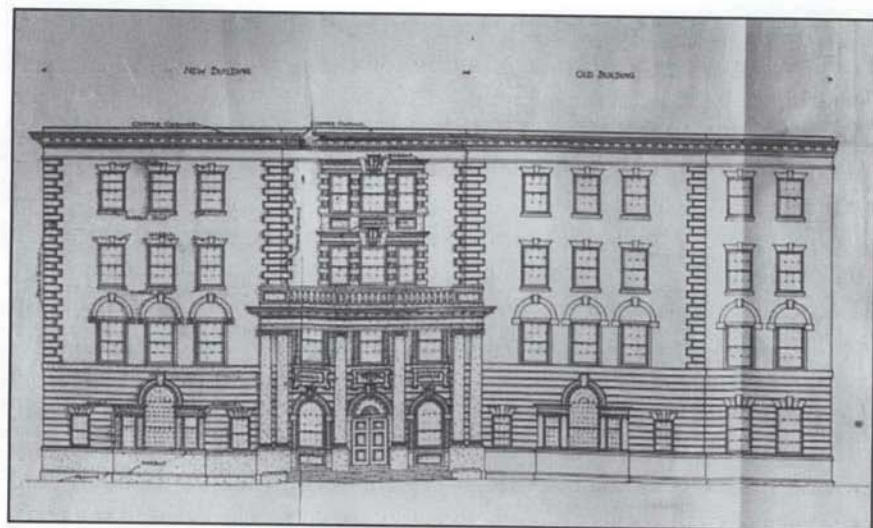


Fig. 14. Elevation drawing of Locust Street facade, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, August 14, 1905, by Savery Scheetz and Savery, Addison Hutton, consulting architect. HSP.

opinion that the old colonial style of architecture will be entirely satisfactory from an artistic standpoint as well as consistent with reasonable economy in the erection of a building of fireproof construction."<sup>121</sup> This third party, expert opinion may have been necessitated by some disagreement among the officers and councilors about the exterior appearance. After settling whatever questions may have been raised and approving the plans, Council directed the Committee to advise the architect "to prepare working plans and specifications, and to invite bids for the construction of the new building in accordance with the preliminary plans submitted."

By the September Council meeting, the committee reported "with regret" that the fifteen bids received "were all so much beyond what the Committee felt the Society could afford" that all were rejected. The architect summarized the financial problem: the bids all averaged about \$100,000. Heating, electric wiring, plumbing, and electric fixtures would cost an

<sup>121</sup> Minutes, July 18, 1905, 25.

additional \$8,000 which, with an architect's commission of \$5,000, brought the total to \$113,000, "without any allowance for any extra work." It was also noted that "there is a deficiency upon the present new building of \$9,500." The committee delicately suggested that the Council may have caused the problem:

There is no doubt that the plans and specifications submitted provide for a building which would seem to be exactly what the Society needs, and while the various suggestions made by the Council have added materially to the cost of the building, they are certainly wise suggestions, if the means to erect the building can be provided. Something, however, must be done, because the total deficiency upon the two buildings is likely to amount, upon the present plan and specifications, to above \$25,000.<sup>122</sup>

Suggested changes in the specifications to reduce the price of the project amounted to \$5,200. Among them were the use of cement skirting rather than Italian marble washboards (baseboards) throughout and a cement floor in the lobby rather than more elaborate flooring; both of these features are in the completed building. Hutton suggested leaving the Jordan annex unaltered in its external dimensions for a saving of \$8,000, which was done as was the substitution of three-piece columns on the portico, rather than monoliths, for a reduction of \$1,500.<sup>123</sup>

"With reference to raising the needed funds," Council first discussed former President Stille's bequest followed by discussion of an appeal to the membership.

Of course, there remains finally to relieve the financial situation, the raising of the necessary money by an appeal to the Society's members. Doubtless many of the members, who have not contributed to the building fund, would gladly do so, if a personal appeal were made to them and the Society's needs gracefully urged, and probably some of those who have heretofore contributed to the building fund, would again do so, now that some little time has elapsed from the issuance of the first appeal.<sup>124</sup>

But the Council reconsidered and later authorized the Committee on

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



Fireproof Building to make whatever alterations were required to reduce the cost of the new building.<sup>125</sup> Within ten days Hutton had altered the specifications and had in hand fifteen "fresh" bids. J. E. & A. L. Pennock, the builders of the 1904 wing, were selected as the low bidder at \$92,000 with completion in ten months. There was additional negotiation on price and contract terms. On November 6, the committee confirmed the selection and Chairman Lewis "immediately notified [Pennock] of this fact by telephone." Perhaps the immediacy of the telephone call relieved the Committee's frustration, because it had been working on these plans for nine months.

By this time all the collections had been moved to the new building. At its November 27 meeting, Council approved the temporary entrance to the stairway of the southern hall from Latimer Street, as was the bill for "wages of \$346.50 for removal of books from the old building into the new." Evidently Latimer Street was not well lighted, because the Building Committee had taken particular care that the temporary entrance "be sufficiently lighted and the front edges of the steps be painted so as to indicate their position and prevent stumbling of those who use them."<sup>126</sup>

The Pennocks must have begun work promptly for, at the November 27, 1905, meeting of the Building Committee Lewis stated that the contractors had begun to tear down the Patterson Mansion. During the committee's December 18 meeting, Lewis reported that "he had been visiting the building twice a day and that the work was progressing satisfactorily." (The Society's location at 13th and Locust was a convenient point midway between John F. Lewis's home at 1914 Spruce and his office in the Bourse, near Independence Hall.) He reported that an old well about fifteen feet deep had been discovered at the northeast corner of the building, where the Patterson kitchen had been located, and that it had been filled with concrete. On December 26, the Building Committee had a lengthy meeting with Hutton, which included discussion of the narrow distance of the building's front from the curb on Locust Street. At the Council meeting later that day, Lewis reported that "work on the new building was progressing satisfactorily. He said that it was an interesting fact that the contractor was hauling away brick clay from the premises to make bricks for the building. He also said

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., Oct. 2, 1905, 38.

<sup>126</sup> Minutes, FP, Nov. 20, 1905.

that on removing the floor of the Patterson mansion it was discovered that the ends of the girders were hopelessly rotten.<sup>127</sup>

Throughout 1906 the Committee on Fireproof Building met frequently to monitor construction and to decide on deletions and additions to the scope of work. The completed building still testifies to the wisdom of those decisions. For example, on January 2 the committee decided to reduce the depth of the portico platform in order to move the front steps a little further from the curb. On January 18, it decided to add back the pilasters and bases to the vestibule; clearly some members, possibly the chairman, wanted these to be faced with marble because that topic appears regularly in the minutes. Hinges and knobs for the front door were deliberated on January 29 and during two of the three meetings in February. A labor dispute brought "Messrs Pennock, the contractor, Savery, the architect, Moore, the bricklayer, Buck the stonecutter, and Wells, the superintendent" to the committee's March 7 meeting "to discuss the differences between the stonecutters and the stonemasons who have discontinued work on the new building." Lewis reported to the Council on March 26 that this "senseless strike" had delayed work for several weeks, but it was now settled—after the Building Committee "withheld all money from the contractors and the matter was taken up by the Advisory Committee of the Building Exchange, with the result that the strike has been ended, and the Stone Cutters will set the cut stone upon our building" as desired by the architect.<sup>128</sup>

At its May 3 meeting, the committee finally selected polished brass hinges and knobs for the front door, and the door itself was chosen on May 21. The question of what kind of lock the door should have, however, was brought to the June 25 Council meeting and referred back to the committee with the stipulation that "the front door lock itself when closed."<sup>129</sup> A telephone system was approved in May, and plans for "electric lighting and push buttons" (switches) were approved. After inspecting the clay model for the coat of arms over the front door, the committee decided on June 18 "to substitute the State arms for those of William Penn." During the November 6 meeting of the Building Committee, one member was delegated to investigate steel shutters for the "rear of [the] building overlooking the alley,"

<sup>127</sup> Minutes, 73. Made of clay with a little sand and lime as mortar for the stone, the basement walls are in excellent condition today.

<sup>128</sup> Minutes, 93.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.



and, with the librarian to research the matter of steel bookcases for the galleries of the Assembly Hall. Later that month, the committee decided not to pay any further bills from Pennock owing to unspecified delays.

In 1907 the committee's attention frequently focused on furnishings. Plans for steel bookcases continued to be studied. In January they agreed that the Society should appeal to the state legislature for fifty thousand dollars for steel bookcases. Two photographs of the second floor Manuscripts Room were taken to illustrate the need for storage furniture. Unfortunately, this appeal was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, bookcases were essential. In May a proposal for bookcases came from the William H. Hoskins Company on Chestnut Street, "A Store for Men's Business Tools" according to its letterhead.<sup>130</sup> The Hoskins Company had designed the cases for "the west room" earlier and proposed to furnish seven cases finished in mahogany for \$1,734.70.

Construction progressed more slowly than either the committee or the builders expected. On April 22, 1907, Lewis read a letter from the Pennocks "promising that the new building would be finished in four weeks."<sup>131</sup> On September 23, he reported "it would be about a month before the new building could be turned over to the Society."<sup>132</sup> It would be November 18, however, before Lewis could report to his committee that "the contractors J. E. & A. L. Pennock delivered him possession of the new building Saturday, the 9<sup>th</sup> inst. at noon and that he accepted possession on behalf of the Historical Society" (fig. 15). As a penalty for the delay, for which no reasons were given in the minutes, \$5,500 was deducted from the Pennocks' final payment.<sup>133</sup> Those reasons must have been obvious at the time.

Another problem was the cash flow in the Building Fund. The Commonwealth's commitment was \$50,000 for the fiscal year beginning June 1, 1905, and \$50,000 for 1906. The Stille bequest was not received until October 1907. The committee withheld payment several times to force work on the project, but lack of cash might have been another motivation for their strict fiscal control.

On November 25, 1907, Lewis reported to Council that the new building

<sup>130</sup> Wm. H. Hoskins Co. to J. F. Lewis, May 15, 1907, HSP Archives.

<sup>131</sup> Minutes, 146.

<sup>132</sup> Minutes, 153.

<sup>133</sup> That sum was later deposited in the Endowment Fund (Minutes, Jan. 27, 1908, 174) "because it had been drawn upon for assistance" (Carson, *History*, 1:185).





Fig. 15. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, artist's rendering of building completed and opened in 1910. From *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 34 (1910), pl. facing p. 257.

was "practically complete, with the exception of the chandeliers and some painting to be done."<sup>134</sup> Although the *building* was practically complete, its finishing and furnishing were not. While the 1904 portion continued in use by the members and other readers (called strangers), the committee would spend the next two years fully completing the entire building. Some of the discussion provides interesting documentation about the structure, finishes, and furniture; and some about financial resources. In December 1907 painters were hired for the new building; then, in January, the committee agreed that the old building (1904) needed to be repainted with the watercolor paint recommended by the painter.<sup>135</sup> Bids were received for two

<sup>134</sup> Minutes, 166.

<sup>135</sup> Although the appearance of No. 123 of the color samples submitted by F. A. Black and Son, painters, was not described in the minutes, fragments tested in 1998 proved to be of a terracotta/apricot tone.

iron grilles designed by the architect for the windows under the portico. That work was awarded to Fred Gevill and Company, as was the erection of "spiral, and one dogleg staircases to be erected at the north end of the main assembly hall communicating between the main floor and the galleries" at \$552 for each metal stairway.<sup>136</sup> During its January 23, 1908, meeting the Committee approved a bill for \$52 from John M. Doyle for a bronze tablet for the front door reading: "The Historical Society of Pennsylvania." It also approved an order for six steel tables for the main reading room immediately south of the lobby. Six more tables were ordered in March. Brook Rawle, the head of the Library and Collections Committee, "was appointed [on March 23] a Committee of One to investigate the subject of steel catalogue cases." Similarly, Mr. Drayton, another Building Committee member, was delegated to obtain "estimates for erecting a wine closet and [an] additional water closet." At the Council meeting later that day, Lewis received authorization to "purchase four dozen chairs, at fifteen dollars each, similar to those purchased two years ago for use in the reading rooms of the Society."<sup>137</sup> Council decided to use Venetian blinds on the first floor on the street sides and "for windows where required" and cotton shades for all other windows.

It was during this March 23, 1908, meeting that the Council officially named the rooms in the buildings of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania:

#### FIRST FLOOR

1. The large room opposite the main entrance to the building shall be called "The Reading Room for the Public."
2. The room back of the main staircase, at the North East corner of the building shall be known as "The Librarian's Room."
3. The toilet room South of The Reading Room for the Public shall be known as "The Retiring Room for Women" and shall be so marked.
4. The large room with gallery West of The Reading Room for the Public shall be called "The Assembly Hall."
5. The room West of the Assembly Hall shall be called "The Gilpin Room."
6. The room South of the Assembly Hall shall be called "Stille Hall," in

<sup>136</sup> Minutes, FP, Dec. 5, 1907. One of these was demolished for the elevator shaft in 1928, the other in preparation for the 1975 renovation.

<sup>137</sup> Minutes, 190. Unfortunately, those chairs are not described; they could be the metal Windsor chairs still in use at the Society.

memory of Charles J. Stille, formerly President and liberal benefactor of the Society.

## SECOND FLOOR

1. The room over the Librarian's Room at the North East Corner of the building shall be known as "The Officers' Room."
2. The front room under the portico facing Locust Street shall be known as "The Council Room."
3. The large room fronting on Thirteenth Street shall be known as "The Governors' Hall" and may be used under the supervision and with the consent of the Committee on Hall and Buildings by subsidiary and analogous Societies.
4. The toilet room South of "The Governors' Hall" shall be reserved for the officers and members of the Council of the Society, but shall not be marked.
5. The South room shall be known as "The Manuscript Reading Room."
6. The room at the North West corner of the building facing Locust Street shall be known as "The Manuscript Room."

## THIRD FLOOR

1. The room over the Assembly Hall shall be known as "The Newspaper Room."
2. The small room West of the Newspaper Room shall be called "The Undeveloped Manuscript Room."
3. The large room to the South of the Newspaper and Undeveloped Manuscript Rooms shall be known as "The Manuscript Work Room."

No name designations were assigned to the undeveloped rooms on the fourth floor.

Following these designations, which reveal so much about the Society and the functioning of the building, is a resolution about usage:

... in order to prevent theft and mutilation of the books, manuscripts and other property of the Society, the large room on the first floor opposite the front door entrance into the building, shall be known as the **READING ROOM FOR THE PUBLIC** and all persons not members of the Society, shall be allowed to read therein, but not elsewhere in the building, excepting only that in case of overcrowding, the Assembly Hall may be used for the same purpose if necessary.



Gold lettering outside the Reading Room for the Public gave the hours as 10 to 6, except Sundays and holidays. During this two-year period of arranging the Society's new building, it is not clear when the Reading Room for the Public opened for use, but the adoption of these regulations two years before the formal opening suggests that the Reading Room for the Public may have been available as soon as it was furnished. "Members Only" was painted on the glass doors leading into the main hall, also called the auditorium. In addition Council decided that a gong would "be sounded about five minutes before closing time of the library so that persons may have due warning."<sup>138</sup>

By February 1908, the Society's painting collection had been hung by Lewis. "In the Public Reading Room, first floor, were hung certain miscellaneous portraits, selected because they were well painted and of persons prominently identified with the history of the State."<sup>139</sup> Because shelving had not yet been purchased for the galleries, pictures were hung there too. The portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Gilpin hung by the Gilpin Room. As collections were moved into place, some changes were made in the building. Col. Brooke Rawle, chairman of the Committee on Library and Collections, asked that the glass flooring be removed from the Gilpin Room and replaced with solid concrete "similar to the rest of the floor; and further, that no books be placed in the Gilpin Room until the floor is so finished with concrete."<sup>140</sup> Security gates were installed on all the doors leading from the gallery of the main hall and on the doors leading into the Jordan annex. By May 1908, iron shutters had been installed on all the windows in the southwestern portion of the building to provide additional security from fire and burglary.<sup>141</sup> By September the Gilpin Library Room had been refloored in concrete and "the toilet room in the southwest room of the basement and the wine closet in the same room had been finished."<sup>142</sup> In October, the Society paid the "balance due to Mr. Addison Hutton, architect, for commissions on extra work on [the] building, including art marble construction," amounting to \$143.75.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>138</sup> Minutes, 170. In 1918 Librarian Jordan closed a letter to John F. Lewis by saying the "gong is about to ring," which indicates that the closing gong remained in used for at least a decade.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>141</sup> John W. Jordan to membership, March 25, 1909, HSP archives.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

There was a lengthy debate during the February Council meeting about how to improve the light level outside the front door. Councilors Pennypacker and (Charlemagne) Tower were asked to request the city to install a hanging electric light "swung from about the center of the street," while they are urging the improved pavement for Locust Street." The Fireproof Building Committee recommended against lamp posts, because the sidewalk was too narrow. Concerning the design and installation estimate from Horn and Brannen Company, manufacturer of the interior lighting fixtures for the building, for lamps on each side of the entrance doors, the committee "believes the price to be high and the design ugly." Furthermore, the committee noted, "the expense of maintaining them would fall entirely upon the Society." Lewis presented the committee's opinion that "members will soon get accustomed to the front steps and will not have any more difficulty in using them than in using the steps of the old building, which were not as well lighted as are the steps of the new building; . . . [which are] lighted by three electric lights under the portico on the tops of the columns."<sup>144</sup>

The committee and Council had been considering the expensive necessity of steel bookcases for the collection for several years. In September of 1908, Lewis reported to the Council that Messrs. Stiffel and Freeman has been contracted to supply about "500 running feet of steel bookcases at \$22 per foot [\$11,000]" to be put in the Gilpin Library Room, the southwestern room on the first floor, the Manuscript Room, the Governors' Room, and the Council Room.<sup>145</sup>

With the Building Fund nearly exhausted, the Society launched a second appeal to the legislature for funding steel cases. John W. Jordan notified the Society's members that the Honorable Israel W. Durham had introduced an act appropriating \$25,000 to the Society for cases to preserve the manuscript collection.<sup>146</sup> Circulars were distributed, Pennypacker wrote "personal notes to every member (82) of both Committees on Appropriations."<sup>147</sup> Like the first proposal, this effort also failed.

In October 1909, Council asked the Fireproof Building Committee to start planning a formal ceremony to dedicate the building. On November

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>145</sup> Minutes, 217.

<sup>146</sup> John W. Jordan to membership, March 25, 1909, HSP archives.

<sup>147</sup> Jordan to Lewis, March 27, 29, 1909, HSP archives.



29 the Committee met to plan the function. President Pennypacker was invited to deliver an appropriate address. The Committee on Reception was asked "what financial aid it could contribute to an evening reception." And Secretary Gregory Keen was asked "to suggest some ladies who might be invited to act as patronesses on the occasion." The Reception Committee responded promptly that it would be "impracticable to utilize one of our regular receptions as an entertainment in celebration of the opening. . ." but it added \$300 to the \$200 "previously donated (and not yet used)." Tempers are evident as President Pennypacker moved to add the members of the Reception Committee to the Committee on Fireproof Building and then broke the tie vote by "casting his vote in the negative."<sup>148</sup> Finally, the first page of the booklet *The Formal Opening of the New Fireproof Building of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, April 6-7, 1910* listed twenty-seven gentlemen, including the majority of the Society's officers and councilors, as the Committee in Charge. The proceedings acknowledged no patronesses.

Prior to the opening ceremony at 4 o'clock, guests explored the new building "examining the rare books, collections of paintings and relics, in Stille Hall, the Hall of Governors, Gilpin Library, and the priceless collections in the Manuscript Department, the Assembly Hall, and rooms of the officers of the Society. The floral display was very attractive."<sup>149</sup> A platform had been placed between the Assembly Hall and Stille Hall to seat the Society's officers and the Fireproof Building Committee. The program began with President Pennypacker introducing John Frederick Lewis, "who was greeted with applause, as he rose to speak." Lewis thanked the architect, Addison Hutton, and the builders, J. E. and A. L. Pennock, "through whose sympathetic co-operation it had been possible to make the new building an example of greater economy per square feet than any other in Philadelphia." (The building cost \$213,390 for five floors, each floor 14,500 square feet, or \$2.94 per square foot). Lewis described the "unique system of fireproof construction."

The building which has been erected for the Society is admirably fitted for the purpose intended. Its chief aim was to serve as a fireproof storage for the Society's invaluable collections, and this aim has been constantly kept in view in every detail of its design and construction. Its walls are of brick, a

<sup>148</sup> Minutes, FP (final), Dec. 11, 1909.

<sup>149</sup> Pennypacker, "Formal Opening," 2.



material already burned, and are of great thickness, with ventilating shafts to the roof. No wood whatsoever has been used in the construction of the building. The interior of the building has been divided into units, so to speak, of fire risk; each portion being separated from the next to it by a fireproof door hung on an inclined railway track, counter-weighted in such a manner that at a dangerous elevation of temperature, a fusible plug melts, the weights fall off and the door automatically closes. The window frames are of iron, and even the sash also, and instead of plain glass being used, half-inch wired glass has been employed throughout the building.

The stairway for the entire western portion of the building is carried in a separate stair well, well fitted with an Underwriter's door upon every floor, and all the windows on the south side of the building are not only supplied with iron sash and frames and wired glass, but also with rolling steel shutters which make the building safe from flames in this direction.

Bookcases of steel have been supplied throughout the building with the exception of two or three rooms, which it is the intention of the Committee to supply, and the large tables used by the public for consulting the Society's collections are of mahoganized steel, so that in every possible way the building has been made as absolutely fireproof as modern ingenuity and skill can devise.<sup>150</sup>

After acknowledging that the Council's primary duty was the care of the Society's immensely valuable collection of American history sources, and that this was kept "steadfastly in mind" during the building's construction, Mr. Lewis "turned to President Pennypacker and handed to him the master keys of the building."<sup>151</sup> Later in the program Pennypacker would acknowledge the attention Lewis paid to the building for over four years.<sup>152</sup>

During the toasts following the formal banquet in the Assembly Hall the next evening (fig. 16), Philadelphia Mayor John E. Reyburn's impromptu remarks characterized the Society's new building as "so well adapted for its purposes, . . . typical of this city, because of its conservativeness, and its thoroughness."<sup>153</sup> Perhaps, diplomatically, he did not comment upon the exterior appearance of the building, about which there was still some public resentment. A 1909 newspaper clipping captioned a photograph of the Society building, taken from the intersection of 13th and Locust, as "Of no

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 53.



Fig. 16. Dinner celebrating opening of new HSP building, April 7, 1910. Photo HSP. Note the total absence of female guests.

credit to the City or State." The accompanying article slammed the building:

Architecture does not lie. Therefore we hope the historical significance of the miserable pile that recently replaced the severe and dignified old Patterson House, is pleasing to the man who is most responsible for his portrayal of the worst aspect of contemporaneous civilization. That it is cheap and vulgar, weak, cold, ugly, is obvious to all who have seen it; that it has no charm, no character, no dignity, no interest, is apparent from our picture. . . . On the other hand, it mirrors the evils of obstinate political favoritism with admirable skill. . . .<sup>154</sup>

A newspaper article published a few days after the opening (April 10, 1910) commented only on ex-Governor Pennypacker's address on the history of the Society.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Unidentified clipping dated 1909 (Perkins Collection, 59, HSP).

<sup>155</sup> Unidentified clipping (Perkins Collection, 63, HSP).

In its new building the Historical Society of Pennsylvania had utilized, for the first time, government funds—whether obtained through favoritism or merit—augmented with gifts from individuals to build the largest and safest structure possible. With foresight, extra space was constructed for future use. It was not necessary to designate names for the rooms on the fourth floor, for they were empty. As the decades went by these rooms, one by one, would be outfitted with metal shelving and cabinets for the continually growing collection. Throughout the nineteenth century the Council fretted over the safety of the collections, mainly the threat of fire. Having solved this problem they could not know that their successors would have to deal with the silent dangers posed to the collections from improper temperature and humidity as well as the inherent flaw in some books and documents of acidic paper. The fireproof building, however, served—and continues to serve—the Society well. There has never been a fire at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.<sup>156</sup>

*Eastville, Virginia*

SUSAN STITT

<sup>156</sup> Like so many researchers before me, I acknowledge with appreciation the support and assistance of the Society's staff as I began this study in 1992 to satisfy my curiosity about the oddly off-center colonial revival building at 13th and Locust Street. Also curious about their workplace, staff helped with additional details as the building was studied for long range planning and then, for renovation. With patience, they assisted in filling out the story with detailed references and re-examined sources for this article. Carol Kersbergen, Assistant Secretary to the Council and my secretary, became an institutional archivist as I read minute book after minute book. The professionals at Venturi, Scott Brown & Associates joined the study in the detailed physical study which was the basis for the 1997–1999 renovation. The archival study and measurements were verified and enhanced by the evidence of the building's history found during the renovation by Unkefer Brothers Construction and its subcontractors. As student of all of these tutors, I alone am responsible for errors and omissions in this account.



