

\$3,000,000 Library Near After 22-Year Fight

Project Needed to Supplement Great City Institutions, Says Colonel McCain

491,000 Books Circulated Here in Year, Each Being Read on Average of Six Times

By GEORGE NOX MCCAIN

ONE of the conspicuous items in the EVENING PUBLIC LEDGER's four years' program for Philadelphia is a new public library building. It is an imperative necessity.

There is \$3,000,000 available for this purpose. The entire scheme has been mapped and planned. The site occupies an entire city square bounded by Nineteenth, Twentieth, Vine and Wood streets. It will be completed within the next few years, and though not the largest will be the finest and most up-to-date building of its kind in the country.

It will be a structure worthy of the city which, as Benjamin Franklin expressed it in his autobiography, "was the mother of all the North American subscription libraries." Founded 183 years ago, the Library Company of Philadelphia preserves its splendid organization intact in its own home, at Juniper and Locust streets, to this day.

If there is any one thing above another which Philadelphia should be proud of it is its libraries. It holds within its heart, in the building of the Franklin Institute, the largest and most complete technical library in the world. It contains 75,000 volumes, which are consulted by scientists, manufacturers and inventors from every land. It is a collection so perfect that complete patent office reports of nearly every country are on file. Those of England run back to the year 1817.

In addition to the above there is the Apprentices' Library, that celebrates its centennial this year, containing 25,000 volumes with a membership of 15,000 individuals. Then there is the great Mercantile Library. The Free Library of Philadelphia is to be housed in the great new structure on the Parkway.

It required nearly eighteen years of effort before any concrete movement was made looking to the erection of this building.

The city authorities, and the Free Library is their particular ward and care, have dawdled, delayed and postponed. For twenty-two years a fund of \$1,000,000 has awaited the leisurely pleasure of those who should have given it the attention it deserved.

Not Available Until 1914

This sum of a \$1,000,000, originally appropriated in 1898, and wholly inadequate for the purpose, was not made available until 1914. Then the people by vote cut the red tape that had hindered the library's progress. It was three years later that the word to "go" was given.

In the intervening years the present central library building at Thirteenth and Locust streets has been overrun.

'What's the Matter With Philadelphia?'

"MOTHER OF LIBRARIES" is another of Philadelphia's titles. Why it should be so will be apparent to the reader of Colonel McCain's present article. Libraries, furnishing mental nutriment to millions, are a feature of Philadelphia's everyday life. In the present administration there is assurance that the Free Library of Philadelphia will be given the physical surroundings it deserves.

Every plan that ingenuity could devise was adopted to accommodate the nearly 2,000,000 persons who in 1919 used the library for reading and study. They stood around like fans at a movie show waiting to seize the first vacant chairs in the reading room. They would have used the tables as seats had they dared. Some brought their own portable chairs. Dress suit cases were carried, opened on the floor, and used by eager students in lieu of chairs.

Other great cities meantime, younger, smaller as to population, but more progressive, erected buildings of approved utility and architectural beauty to house their libraries. Cleveland, Seattle, Boston, Pittsburgh, stand conspicuous in this respect.

In the old main building at Thirteenth and Locust, rare volumes are hidden away for lack of space in the semi-darkness of overcrowded stacks. The finest collection of textile prints, gloriously arrayed in colors on silk and bound in the best of Old World bindings, volumes that cannot be replaced at any price, and available to students, workers and manufacturers who have come from every part of the country to consult them, have been daily and nightly in danger of fire all these years.

In proportion to population, number of volumes and extent of home circulation it is one of the most economically managed libraries in the country. It stands third in that respect. Its librarians, in spite of hindrances and discouragements, have accomplished wonders.

With an expenditure of \$372,000, less than one-half of Chicago's annual appropriation and one-fifth that of New York city, they have been able to answer every reasonable demand upon the institution. The city of Boston, with one-third the population of Philadelphia, spends \$200,000 more than this

city every year in maintaining its library. Detroit, with half the population, spends \$25,000 more.

This city gets more for its money from its free library, and at less cost, than any other city in the United States. Every other city, with a few exceptions, closes its free library anywhere from one week to one month every year. Philadelphia is one of the cities that never shuts its doors to the public.

One is compelled to wonder what Philadelphia expects for its money. The Free Library is more than a library. It is a vast public institution with a diversified array of other public benefits. It is an educational institution second to the public schools. It maintains free lecture lectures and clubs. It encourages meetings of business men's associations, medical societies, neighborhood and women's organizations. It sets aside story hours and clubrooms for children.

It supplies not only Philadelphia, but the state of Pennsylvania and other states with reading matter for the blind. There are seventy traveling libraries circulating in police, fire and telegraph stations. It never refuses a call for its services where such a call can be answered.

It stands third among the cities of the country in the number of books circulating.

Free Library System

The Free Library is a system. It maintains twenty-eight branches within the city's corporate limits—one library building to less than every two wards in the city. The buildings of twenty-

two of these branches cost \$1,500,000. It is a vast centrifugal force, power is felt on every avenue, along every street, down every alley and up every court and byway—if the people care to take advantage of it.

During the year 1919 there were 3,491,000 books circulated. Each book in the library was read on an average six times. Of this number, there were 1,300,000 taken out and read by children. There were 1,900,000 persons used the library buildings.

The reference book department alone is one of the most complete in the world. There are 7862 volumes of scores and musical textbooks in the music department alone. The total number of books in the library is 575,000, in seventy-three languages, and cared for by 392 employees.

I have endeavored in the above, avoiding as far as possible uninteresting statistics, to convey some idea of the treasure that Philadelphia possesses in her free libraries alone.

Everything now indicates that the city's dawdling policy is at an end. A library building, unique in its appointments and accessories, has been provided for. It will be one of the most striking buildings in the group of Parkway structures to be completed during the administration of J. Hampton Moore as Mayor.

It will be one of the architectural features of the city.

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