3. University Hall, library

II. PLANNERS

With the University's rapid growth, overcrowding became a general campus complaint and demands for expanded library facilities intensified. The library wing of University Hall contained not only the library (Ill. 3), but museums of industrial art, of natural history, and an art gallery. The reading room, intended to supplement classroom instruction, was open "throughout the day for study, reading and consulting authorities." The faculty voted--on February 24, 1892--for engineering, library, and museum buildings, "the order not to imply preference, all being considered absolutely necessary."
Several months later, Nathan C. Ricker outlined, as requested, general plans and requirements for the buildings, and the Trustees voted that construction be commenced as soon as possible.\(^1\) At the next meeting, the Committee on Buildings and Grounds recommended that appropriations be given for museum and engineering structures but the library was not mentioned.\(^2\)

Students continued to grumble about conditions in the dark and cramped University Hall library, with its piled up, often inaccessible books, and the faculty recommended--since funds seemed to be limited--that the engineering and library buildings be constructed first.\(^3\)

Urgency notwithstanding, not much was said or done for almost two years. Professor C. M. Moss submitted a bitter letter to the Board asking to be relieved of his post as librarian--a job given without his knowledge until he was actually appointed. He cited archaic restrictions in purchasing books, an irrational cataloguing system, and inadequate appropriations. Prevailing space limitations were most emphatically stressed:

\(^1\) 16th Report (1892), 255-256.  \(^2\) 17th Report (1894), 31-32.  \(^3\) Illini, Sept. 27, 1894; 17th Report (1894), 154.
The urgent need for more room is apparent. The incongruity of having 100 or more students studying, conversing, and reading in the same room is also apparent. It has been impossible to preserve quiet in the room, and unadvisable to attempt it. Our shelves are full. . . . We need, and need now, a new, modern building, with all appliances for this vital part of our University work. Upon this probably every member of the faculty is agreed, and that it is our foremost need in the way of buildings.

After still another year, the Trustees finally adopted a resolution that the state appropriate $150,000 for a new library building—the existing one was inadequate in size and not fireproof, they acknowledged—and that the Committee on Buildings and Grounds immediately consider its erection. They further authorized a $1200 competitive prize for its design. Subsequent events, however, indicate that the style of this important building was not determined on the architect's drawing board alone.

University officials began to plan for the new building, and imbued with the idea that it ought to be a particularly distinctive structure, President Draper and Colonel Richard P. Morgan, chairman of

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1 17th Report (1894), 250-251.

2 18th Report (1896), 113-114. The allotment of $150,000 constituted a considerable sum and the architects kept the cost to "within one hundred dollars of the original appropriation." 19th Report (1898), 138.

3 Board member Morgan's qualifications were really to be tested; he billed himself "Civil Engineer and Railway Expert," on his stationery. State Archives, Springfield. [Find more accurate identification of Morgan, e.g. from published sources.]
the Building Committee, visited Chicago and Minneapolis to personally acquire practical knowledge of other library buildings. Draper was a stern and exacting organizer, "of broad vision, remarkably free from prejudice. . . . If a building was to be erected, he wished the plans perfected, the materials ready, the ground surveyed, and the money appropriated before earth was turned."¹

Invitations were issued to architects to enter into competition, with the only definite stipulation that the building be fireproof throughout. ² Several months later, the jury reported that its search for a design that was "noble, dignified and strong, yet quiet and reposeful and free from pretentiousness and show" was fulfilled by an "especially commendable" project titled "Via Veritas Vita," and awarded it first prize (Ill. 21). The Committee met with the winner, Edward G. Bolles—a young man from Springfield—and asked that he supervise the construction, but he declared himself inexperienced in that respect and introduced a partner who had been a "practical constructor." But the Committee did not favor such an arrangement and abruptly terminated the interview. That evening they called on the Governor and unanimously voted to reject all the competition entries, and to call on a prominently

¹ Nevins, 154. ² Ibid, 162.
known architect instead. ¹

The distinguished Chicago firm of D. H. Burnham was called
upon, and accepted the challenge. Morgan wrote to Burnham: Gov-
ernor Altgeld "has manifested a decided interest in regard to the
character of this building . . . and also has a preference in regard
to the exterior lines."²

Draper's letters hint at some of the problems he might have
then been experiencing:

. . . I am glad indeed to learn of the employment of D. H.
Burnham and Company in connection with the new library
building. I am sure it is not only above criticism but that
it will be a complete answer to any gossip which may have
started, and that it will meet the approval of the people of
the State. . . .³

The Governor does not seem to be having his way in the mat-
ter of the plans and I feel sure that in the end his way will
prove to be a good way.

¹ ¹⁸th Report (1896), 190-191; ILLINI, Sept. 27, 1895. Bolles
held the title "Prizewinner" for a mere two weeks, but received his
award. After the negotiations with the next architect were completed,
Draper wrote: "I think this is the most satisfactory outcome of the
whole matter. I am not at all certain that the $1200 which we paid
for plans will be wasted, and I feel sure that under such a manage-
ment we will get a much better building. . . ." Draper to Armstrong,
Oct. 4, 1895. Unless otherwise noted, unpublished materials are lo-
cated in the University Archives.

² ¹⁸th Report (1896), 191.

³ Draper to Morgan, Oct. 3, 1895.

⁴ Draper to Smith, Oct. 7, 1895.
[Burnham's sketches] were without merit. . . . So we told him what we wanted and he made very copious notes . . . in the course of the day he several times remarked that he was becoming more and more convinced that the Governor's style of architecture was not suited to this building . . . and that he would see the Governor about it.

Daniel H. Burnham was not to be trifled with. He had served as powerful chief architect at the Chicago Fair in 1893 and headed an architectural firm that "had probably the largest practice in the United States . . . and prestige that was unchallenged and invaluable."2

Colonel Morgan attempted to placate Burnham: "Whatever may have been said to you by this committee in regard to any plan for the library building . . . you will kindly accept as suggestive only, because the design is to be yours"; but demonstrating relentless perseverance, Morgan added, "While this is true, and perhaps you may not be able to concur with the suggestions which have been made as the result of a recent conference between Governor Altgeld and the sub-committee, still it is to be suggested that the design last suggested to you by the Governor will be as completely and carefully perfected in every respect for presentation to the Trustees as your

1 Draper to Morgan, Oct. 15, 1895.

own design, should you present an alternative. "1

The Building Committee tersely announced that Burnham would present "perfect designs" on December 11. 2 Unable to attend that crucial meeting, the imperious Governor sent two communications to Draper: a letter, December 9. Reminding him of his architectural preference, the Tudor-Gothic with towers, he left no room for doubt. "Mr. Burnham will present another plan of a low building, with no towers, for a library. While I do not wish to influence the board [emphasis mine] on this question, I do feel very strongly that this is not the style of building we want and need at the University at present."

And the next day, Altgeld dispatched a telegram: "Impossible for me to come there today. Did you get my letter of yesterday? Please answer."3

With "regret" the Board found itself "unable to approve the design in the style of architecture most admired by Governor Altgeld "because the cost estimates for the Gothic plan were considerably higher than the

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18th Report (1896), 194.  2Ibid.

3Ibid., 198. The Governor engineered the gloomy castle on the Rhine that still guards administrative personnel at Eastern Illinois University; it lacks only a portcullis and moat (Ill. 22). What is most astonishing is that Altgeld fought the Urbana and Charleston battles at virtually the same moment. Eastern Illinois' Trustees had tentatively engaged an Indianapolis firm on October 5, 1895; two days later, Altgeld intervened and had the plans cancelled--and that was just after he had had Urbana's prizewinner scrapped. Another idea was offered and that too was rejected. Finally another firm, from Bloomington, was favored with the contract. History of Eastern Illinois University (Charleston, n. d.), 27.
budget allowed, and since eight of the ten Board members voted for
the Grecian design\(^1\) on the ground that it was more attractive and
appropriate to modern educational uses, and particularly to library
purposes than the Tudor design.\(^1\) Undaunted, Altgeld called a spe-
cial session, but Burnham, probably weary of downstate bickering
and indecision, unexpectedly resigned.

And so it was resolved—on a motion of John Peter Altgeld—
that the University's own architectural staff be asked to present de-
signs for the library building. Professors Ricker and White promised
and produced, in less than thirty days, four sketches and cost esti-
mates; and on February 4, 1896, their Romanesque plan was found
acceptable to all—including the highest official in the State of Illinois.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) 18th Report (1896), 198-200.

\(^2\) Ibid., 233. Draper exaggerated when recalling the affair:
"... after the most famous architects of the United States had failed
to present satisfactory plans, the matter was turned over to the dean of
the architecture department, Ricker." Chicago Tribune, Mar. 14,
1900. The Governor's architectural predilections were recalled by
Draper some seventeen years later: "It is true that he had a zeal and
an outlook which made us some troubles. He was bound to put a Ger-
man castellated style of architecture upon all the buildings in the State
in his administration, and did not propose to let our library building
escape. He telegraphed me asking me to come to his house by the next
train. I feared the Tudor architecture and had occasion to. He had a
book full of it and argued that it was economical and attractive. I
urged that the motif and essence of that architecture was military de-
fense, not education and generosity: it would do for an armory but not
for a library. ... Mr. Burnham made some designs which the Gov-
ernor did not like and which led to a row between the two and happily
put an end to the Governor's kind of architecture at the University.
Other institutions were less fortunate." Andrew S. Draper, "Governor
Altgeld and the University of Illinois," Alumni Quarterly, VII (April,
1913), 80-81. For Altgeld's views on architecture, see Appendix B.