

THE REPORT
— OF —
OLMSTED BROTHERS

LANDSCAPE .. ARCHITECTS
OF BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS

Outlining Plans for the Future Arrangement
of the Grounds and Buildings of the
State University of Iowa



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Report of Olmsted Brothers

CHICAGO, APRIL 10, 1905.

DR. GEORGE E. MACLEAN, President,
The State University of Iowa.

DEAR SIR:—

Having visited the site of the University, and having conferred with you and other officials, we beg to submit the following report:—

LAND FOR EXTENSIONS

Looking to the future the most important topic requiring discussion and action, is evidently that of the acquisition of more land. The original scheme limited the University grounds to the Old Capitol Park, consisting of about four city blocks. The University has long since outgrown this comparatively limited tract of land, and has acquired land on three blocks lying east of the north half of the Old Capitol campus, one block west of the south half a considerable tract of low land between Front Street and the river, and portions of blocks north and south of the campus.

The process of acquisition of additional land must evidently go on indefinitely, but some other motives than those of convenience and cheapness should be kept in mind and should often have more weight than those.

In our opinion the policy should be for the University to acquire gradually as opportunity occurs, the three blocks of land south of Iowa Avenue and east of Clinton Street, several blocks of land on both sides of Capitol Street and Clinton Street north of Jefferson Street, the block of land west of Clinton Street and south of Washington Street, the re-

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mainder of the block west of Capitol Street and south of Washington Street, the two blocks of land west of Madison Street and south of Washington Street, and all of the land west of Madison Street, and north of Iowa Avenue to the river.

In addition to the above described tracts of land, the University should acquire from 80 to 160 acres or more of land west of the river, from the Burlington Street bridge northward, partly for the preservation of the landscape and partly as reserve sites for such state institutions as can desirably be affiliated with, or located near the University, and which, being self contained, would not necessarily as a matter of convenience, need to be located in the midst of the city.

DESIGN TO CONTROL EXTENSIONS

While the acquisition of the above mentioned land will be exceedingly desirable, merely from the general motive of providing for future necessary buildings, it should be constantly recognized that the acquisition of land, and the assignment of it for special buildings ought to be controlled by definite motives of design. The various classes of buildings should be grouped together according to their uses and also in suitable relation to the nucleus of the University which must ever be the Old State Capitol, and moreover, many questions of appearance as well as of convenience and system in the distribution of buildings must constantly be borne in mind if satisfactory results are to be secured.

The primary design for the disposition of buildings on the Old Capitol campus suggested by Messrs. Van Brunt and Howe, is an excellent one and should be realized by the erection of the two buildings contemplated southwest and northwest of the Old Capitol building respectively. In doing this, however, we advise that these two buildings be made to have rather a long, narrow shape, with the length

north and south, instead of having such great width from east to west as characterizes the Liberal Arts and Natural History buildings. As a matter of convenience to the greatest number, these buildings should be devoted to such studies or purposes as are pursued by the largest number of students of the various departments. It has been suggested hitherto that the southwest building site be used for the permanent Gymnasium, and that the northwest building site be used for the permanent Library.

From such study as we have been able to give the problem, we are inclined to think that either of these sites could well be used for the Gymnasium, but that the Library would best be placed on some other site where a series of extensive additions can be made without encountering the difficulties and limitations due to the marked declivity of the land at both of these proposed sites. The Library should not only be central so as to be convenient for all students, but it should be given a prominent location, and should be designed in a more monumental style than perhaps any other University building. The site which seems to best meet these requirements at such moderate cost that it can be secured within a reasonable time, appears to be the block of land west of Clinton Street and north of Jefferson Street. On this block the library could be designed to have its principal front facing toward the Old Capitol campus. It might be possible to so design it that the north and south axis of the Hall of Natural History would control the design of its western half and the eastern half being a repetition about the middle line of the block, would have a fine frontage on the campus east of Natural History Hall.

As to the Gymnasium, we are inclined to think the northwest site would be the more permanently satisfactory, as being more central between the working buildings of the University and the dormitories and boarding houses of the students, which will almost necessarily be in the region north and northeast of the Old Capitol campus.

To any architect it would be obvious that future buildings outside of the Old Capitol campus should be located along the sides of the axial avenues, running north and south and east from the Old Capitol building. A considerable part of the land north of Iowa Avenue has already been acquired for University purposes, and the motive above suggested should lead to the acquisition of all the land on the south side of Iowa Avenue, although it is hardly to be expected that this process can be completed in the near future. Still, having the motive in mind, the University would be justified in locating important buildings on the south side of Iowa Avenue between Dubuque Street and Gilbert Street, leaving the expensive sites between Clinton Street and Dubuque Street to be acquired and utilized at some comparatively distant time in the future. The same policy could be properly pursued in the case of the block west of Clinton Street and south of Washington Street, that is to say, if the north and east sides of this block cannot be acquired in the near future, the University would be justified nevertheless in erecting an important building on the west or south side of the block.

In assigning building sites on both sides of Capitol Street north of Jefferson Street, our advice would be to reserve sites on the west side for large dormitories, preferably for women's dormitories, for the reason that these sites command the most beautiful and extensive views which should be made available for the living rooms of students, rather than for working buildings.

The east side of Capitol Street, on the contrary, for two blocks and perhaps three, north of Jefferson Street, is so conveniently near the Old Capitol campus that it should be reserved for working buildings, preferably, it would seem for such as would be most patronized by women students, as, for instance, the Hall of Music and the Hall of Art. Clinton Street for two or three blocks north of Jefferson Street should also be reserved for working buildings, presumably

for professional schools which do not yet exist or are now small, but which will require extensive buildings with room to expand when they are permanently located.

Another motive which it might be well to consider would be to close up the north end of Capitol Street, and to locate one of the largest and most important of the professional schools with its center on the center line of Capitol Street, and with its greatest length east and west. Thus the vista northward through Capitol Street from the Old Capitol campus could be made to have a fine architectural terminus. Whether this same motive could be applied in the case of Iowa Avenue by locating an important building across it at the top of the hill east of Ralston Creek, is perhaps doubtful, but it is at least worth some consideration.

We have already touched upon some motives for the acquisition of the low land between Madison Street and the river. As a matter of design it seems very important to remove all buildings on this land from Washington Street to Jefferson Street and to keep the land as far as possible as an open field, giving a broad expanse of green for the eye to rest upon in all views from the high ground east of it to and across the river. The land could, of course, be utilized for baseball and other field sports. From the same motive it would be desirable to keep the blocks west of Madison Street, north of Jefferson Street and south of Washington Street free from buildings. The athletic field is conveniently located and would interfere with the breadth and simplicity of the view but little, providing any large structures such as a stadium and a building to contain dressing rooms for those using the athletic ground and the river for bathing or rowing, be kept well toward the south end. Such ugly features as the necessary enclosing fence of the athletic ground and the interurban railway can soon be concealed from view by plantations of tall growing shrubbery or small growing trees. Nor would the utilization of the ground along the river north of Jefferson Street for a botan-

ical garden, with a small conservatory and green house be objectionable in the view, but a larger building, such as the Hall of Botany, if it should be desirable to associate it with the botanical garden, would best be placed further north and preferably on the east side of Madison Street.

RIVER PARK

The idea has been talked of that the land on both sides of the river northward from that which will be occupied for University purposes, should be secured and improved as a public park. Such a scheme would be of very great benefit to the University as a whole, as well as to the individual officers and students of the University who would be able to make use of it, and the State would, therefore, be amply justified in aiding the execution of the scheme, pecuniarily and otherwise.

If only the land could be secured, leaving improvements to be accomplished very gradually, much would be gained, as the land is otherwise liable to be put to uses by private owners which will enhance the difficulty and expense of ultimately acquiring it. This argument applies with far greater force, however, to the high grounds west of the river. It would be most undesirable to defer the acquisition of these lands until some definite project for a state institution to be placed on them should have been adopted. It is altogether likely that the recent construction of the interurban railway will give rise to the occupation of more or less of this land for residences, so that no time should be lost in securing it for park purposes and for future state institutions.

If the topography is such as to make it possible, it would be well to locate some building with a tower on the cross axis of the Old State Capitol extended, so as to create a focal point in the view west from the Old Capitol.

BOULEVARDS

It has already been suggested that Iowa Avenue and the

four streets each one hundred feet wide which bound the four sides of the Old Capitol campus, should have central grass plots instead of the usual excessively wide and dreary roadway. Except where the requirements of business prevent, the idea is undoubtedly a good one. The aim should be to make the central grass plots as wide as possible at the expense of the width of the sidewalks and roadways. Where these streets are occupied by residences, considering that the town is a comparatively small one, we believe that roadways twenty feet, or even eighteen feet wide will serve well enough, provided the central grass plots are limited in length to little less than half a block, and we believe that it will be better as a rule to narrow the sidewalks to fifteen feet or even twelve feet, so as to gain as much width as possible in the central grass plots. Where, owing to existence of important trees, so much opposition arises as to prevent the narrowing of the sidewalks, it is a question of whether the more dignified, as well as more economical arrangement would not be secured by having a central driveway twenty-four feet wide, than by throwing all the rest of the space into turf areas. That has been the more usual practice, and it has generally proved entirely satisfactory. At any rate the general idea of reducing the wide roadways and increasing the amount of turf space in residential streets is a most commendable one.

DESIGN OF BUILDINGS

This University in common with almost every other important university of the country which has had a gradual growth, has rendered itself open to criticism on the score of appearance by erecting buildings of various styles of architecture, including buildings without style, and of all sorts of building material on the exterior. We believe one of the most important subjects for the University to consider and determine is the idea of harmony in style and material of all future buildings. It certainly produces a bad effect

of incongruity, of lack of continuity of policy, ignorance of and indifference to the higher and more comprehensive laws of esthetics and an excessive devotion to the love of variety and novelty and abandonment to the whims and purposes of individuals unworthy of a great university. One may expect individualism, as manifested in architecture, to be rampant in the city as a whole, because our cities have not yet arrived at the appreciation of the necessity for esthetic control of building, as well as control from motives of safety from fire and from danger to human life. In most of the important cities abroad, the appearance of buildings is regulated for the common good of the community, but if we cannot yet expect our citizens to give up some of their individual freedom of action in such matters of art as effect their fellow citizens, it certainly seems as though particular bodies of men placed in control of institutions involving the erection of numerous buildings, should adopt such rules as will insure a reasonable degree of harmony and dignity in groups of buildings devoted to important purposes. The time is particularly opportune for this University to adopt desirable rules affecting the appearance of buildings, because they have but recently begun upon an era of building construction which is a great advance upon all that has been done by it previously in that line with respect to magnitude, substantiality, fire resisting qualities, and architectural style. Four important buildings are already constructed or are under construction in one of the classic styles, and of which the exterior walls are made of Bedford limestone. This being the case, it seems to us obvious that not only the two proposed buildings southwest and northwest of the Old Capitol should be erected of the same material, and in the same style, but that all other important buildings recognized to be permanent, should also be built of the same material and in the same style. If particular cases arise in which it should be thought that this rule would involve too great expense, we believe that the proposed building should either

be reduced in size to bring it within the appropriation, while conforming to the rule, leaving opportunity for additions in the same style and material, or else that the building should be made frankly temporary in appearance with respect at least to its exterior walls. If the walls are built of brick, the brick should be of cheap quality and there should be no attempt at decorative architectural detail, either by means of stone trimmings or elaborate cornices, porticoes, and other features.

No doubt there will always be some who do not believe it to be proper for the State to spend money in the architectural ornamentation of necessary buildings. We believe that this is a narrow and mistaken view to take of the matter. It is not necessary that public buildings of comparatively minor importance should be noticeably ornate or extravagantly costly, but no matter how unimportant, every structure which is to be seen should be designed with due regard for appearance, and if the circumstances do not warrant or permit of elaborate architectural details, the capable architect will at least secure beauty of a simple sort in the size, proportion and distribution of the absolutely essential features of walls, windows, doors and roof, and it should never be supposed that because a building appropriation is very limited, the design is a matter of little consequence.

FUTURE BUILDINGS

We have incidentally mentioned some of the contemplated future buildings and have suggested sites for them. It is impossible to enumerate at this time all the buildings which will be or may be required within the next ten or twenty years, but some of them may be referred to as being perhaps more immediately necessary or probable than others.

The large Assembly Hall in which the whole body of students can gather for certain functions, will be needed before long. This building should of course, be conveniently located, and being necessarily rather large, will

be imposing and should, therefore, have an architectural treatment befitting these characteristics. The site at the northeast corner of Iowa Avenue and Clinton Street is that which has been heretofore contemplated. We believe, however, that it will be a good policy to reserve this site to be used for some building more intimately related to the Medical College already begun on the northern half of this block.

The next most available site that is at the same time prominent and adjoining the Old Capitol Campus, and that will not be better devoted to some other University building, appears to be that at the northeast corner of Clinton and Jefferson Streets.

The Library, as we have already stated, would best be located on the block north of Jefferson Street between Capitol Street and Clinton Street. If, as seems proper, the Museum for Anthropology, Archeology and Art, is combined with or connected with the Library, it would be necessary to reserve at least the whole block for these purposes, although in this case as in many other cases of reservations of land for future buildings, unimportant buildings such as residence clubs, small dormitories and dwellings, can occupy the land until it is needed for the more important buildings.

The Art School may either be made to occupy a portion of the Art Museum or it may be assigned a separate site in convenient proximity to the Museum.

A new Astronomical Observatory should be given a site at such distance from the city and railroads that it will not be interfered with by smoke and vibrations. As the prevailing winds are southwesterly, a site on the hills west of the river and not too far from the interurban railway would be free from the city smoke and at the same time conveniently accessible by electric cars.

The College of Law now in the Old Capitol and the School of Political and Social Science requiring only rooms of moderate size and of the lecture hall type, would best be

accommodated, for some years, at least, in a building to occupy the proposed site northwest of the Old Capitol, unless this site should be preferably utilized for the Gymnasium, in which case the Law College could be on the corresponding site south of this.

The College of Education could be accommodated without much difficulty for a while in the same building as the Law College, but a separate building will be eventually required and land for this would best be reserved on the east side of Capitol Street, north of Market Street.

The Hall for Physics should be away from the ordinary heavy traffic of the city and may well, therefore, be assigned a site on the east side of Capitol Street, north of Davenport Street.

The School of Botany, with its herbarium and museum of specimens, may either be located in connection with the Botanical garden, as we have before suggested, or it may be combined with the general Museum connected with the Library.

The existing Chemical Laboratory will soon be outgrown and additional accommodation will have to be provided. This may be done at first by one or more additions to the existing building and in the cheap style of the present brick building, which will be readily recognized to be somewhat temporary, or a more dignified, as well as more commodious building, can be erected in the block south of Iowa Avenue, between Dubuque and Linn Streets. This site would not only be very convenient for medical students, but would be just about as convenient as the present site for the students of other departments.

The Hall for the College of Dentistry, it would seem would be most appropriately located on the block north of Iowa Avenue and east of Clinton Street, where the Medical College is already started. More specifically, it might be immediately west of Close Hall.

The Gynasium, as already stated, would be most conven-

iently located near the Old Capitol. We are inclined to think as most of the students will reside north of Jefferson Street and should be encouraged to use the Gymnasium as much as possible, by having it near their work or residence, that the best site would be that northwest of the Old Capitol. We do not think, as has been suggested, that the Gymnasium ought to be near the Athletic Field. The dressing-room and bathing requirements should be accommodated in a building close to the field. It is to be hoped that the practical requirements of the Gymnasium can be accommodated in a building which can be made to bear a reasonably close resemblance to the other three buildings of the group about the Old Capitol. Should this prove not to be the case, we believe it would be advisable, as a matter of general appearance, to relegate the Gymnasium to a site on the west side of Capitol Street just north of the old Hall of Natural Science which is under contract to be moved to the west side of Capitol Street. It seems likely that the rapid slope of the land down westerly from Capitol Street will facilitate having the Men's Gymnasium below the street level and the Women's Gymnasium above it, which will be both convenient and economical.

No doubt in time it will be necessary to provide a common dining hall for women, and later perhaps, one for men. The Women's Commons could be economically accommodated in the high basement which any women's dormitory west of Capitol Street would necessarily have. The Men's Commons would probably best be on the east side of Clinton Street, north of Market Street, or perhaps better, north of Bloomington Street.

An enlargement of the University Hospital is already provided for by a wing on the east of the present building. The land east of this and also north of the Hospital should be reserved for additional wings. The Mortuary Chapel might be directly north of the present administration part

of the Hospital, and other accommodations can be provided east or northeast of the Hospital.

A Laboratory for Biology and Bacteriology would best be located on the south side of Iowa Avenue, east of Linn Street, leaving the block west of Linn Street for the Chemical Laboratory and enlargements of it. The location of the laboratories south of Iowa Avenue and east of Linn Street would probably be confined to the north half of the block, and in any case would not necessarily be any worse for the Post Office than such buildings as private owners of the land are likely to maintain. If it should be thought desirable, and if it is determined that there is room enough, the College of Education, with its accompanying kindergarten and primary schools could occupy the east half of the block south of Iowa Avenue, and west of Gilbert Street, instead of the site before suggested on the east side of Capitol Street. The advantage of the Iowa Avenue location would be that it would be nearer to the part of the population of the city that would patronize the kindergarten and primary school in the largest numbers.

The State Historical Society would best be accommodated in the proposed Library.

The Club for men and that for women should both be conveniently located between the working buildings and the district occupied by dormitories and residences. Considering that the clubs will undoubtedly have to be enlarged from time to time, and it is unlikely that a fully adequate appropriation will be available for a dignified, fireproof building, it would perhaps be best to locate these clubs in the block north of Jefferson Street and east of Capitol Street, eventually to be occupied by the Library and Museum, building the clubs cheaply of wood so that they could be abandoned or torn down or moved when their sites are required for permanent buildings.

The Hall of Music may be located either on the east side of Capitol Street, a block or two north of the Old Capitol

Campus, or on the east side of Clinton Street, in which case it might be found advisable to combine it with the large Assembly Hall which would be used in times of concerts.

In addition to discussing the above topics with you and other officials of the University, our advice was asked as to a number of matters of detail, with which it seems unnecessary to burden this report. If desired, we will report separately on these minor matters.

Yours respectfully,

OLMSTED BROTHERS.

STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
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LIBRARY

