

The Charles Hayden Memorial Library¹

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THE NEW Charles Hayden Memorial Library is the third physical repository for the collection of recorded knowledge of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The first was located in the Rogers building on Boylston Street in Boston on a site now part of the New England Mutual building. The Rogers building is fittingly recalled in the design imprinted on the drapes in the Dewey Library. Here William P. Atkinson, professor of English and history, undertook from 1866-68 to supervise the acquisition of books for the fledging institute. From 1887-89 Clement W. Andrews, an instructor in organic chemistry, was employed to catalog the library and was appointed its librarian in 1889. His work during the ensuing six years laid the foundation for the institute library as we know it today. On his departure to found the John Crerar Library in Chicago, Robert Payne Bigelow, then an instructor in biology, was appointed his successor. For 30 years, from 1895-1925, Dr. Bigelow labored to establish and develop a library service commensurate with the growing stature of the institute. In 1916, with the completion of the main group of buildings in Cambridge, the library was moved to its second location in Building 10, not to the ground floor, as the architect had intended, but to floors five to eight beneath the great dome. The lofty circular reading room surrounded by stacks and embellished by a swinging pendulum

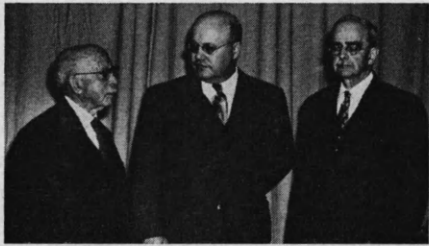
suspended from the center of the dome is familiar to all but the most recent graduates. Dr. Bigelow was succeeded in 1925 by William N. Seaver, the fourth institute librarian, who, until his retirement in 1947 as the shadow of the Charles Hayden Memorial Library was looming above the horizon, ably continued and expanded the tradition of timely, convenient and efficient library service to faculty, students, staff and alumni.

These goals of timely, convenient and efficient service best express the philosophy underlying M.I.T.'s library system. To insure timeliness and convenience, nine fully-integrated branch libraries have been established in locations near the departments that they serve; to promote efficiency, rigorous scrutiny of acquisitions, equal attention to the elimination of outdated or surplus books coupled with large purchases of reference material and periodicals, the real working strength of the library, must go hand in hand with latest developments in documentation control and use whether expressed in terms of microfilm, microprint, punched cards, rapid selectors or electronic data utilization devices. Mere size has never been an objective. While M.I.T.'s approximately 450,000 books, the largest institutional library of its type in the country, places it 41st among college and university libraries, there is no reason, if the needs of its users can be met by a smaller collection, why it cannot and should not be reduced in size.

The breathless, frantic pace of research in science, in engineering and in humanities relies for its realization as in the past on

¹ Remarks at the dedication of the Charles Hayden Memorial Library, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, May 19, 1950.

publication. The sheer volume and complexity of printed material now available has created problems of communication, of the organization of information and of documentation that are fully as grave as issues of national and international policy of which they form a significant part. Books may now be obsolescent before they can be printed and distributed. Periodicals lag far behind the forefront of progress. Sometimes a badly needed article even after it has been approved by an editorial board is usually delayed from three to 18 months in publication. As a palliative, "preprints" are distributed in small numbers on a more or less haphazard basis. These informal methods of publication have served to complicate the situation even further. It has been authoritatively stated



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that since World War II, research in science and engineering has increased by a factor of 10, but much of it has been repetitious and useless because of the breakdown of communication. It might be argued that these matters are of no concern to the library, which should be content to accept, organize and service publications created by others, but the hollowness of the argument is amply apparent. No longer may a library live by books alone. It will remain the storehouse of knowledge but must also become an active energetic center for current documentation and information.

There is another side to the picture. The student of today faces an infinitely more complex world than that even of a decade past. In order to orient himself, to achieve intellectual maturity, a student must either spend more years in study or make more effective use of the time at his disposal. The tyrant time can be a terrible taskmaster. Through organization of its holdings to supply data in condensed and palatable form, through judicious selection of readable editions, and possibly more important than either, through the provision of truly adequate physical surroundings designed and intended to be used and enjoyed to the utmost, the library may make no small contribution to the process of education. There is no inherent virtue in discomfort in a library. Relaxed, comfortable attractive surroundings facilitate reading and study. The Charles Hayden Memorial Library is not and shall not become austere. If it did, much of its utility would be lost.

It is interesting, and it may be significant, to reflect that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and its library have registered greatest progress directly after periods of armed conflict. The institute itself was formed during and immediately after the first great war of modern times, the Civil War (perhaps better termed the "War between the States"). Occupancy of the main group of institute buildings, including the former Central Library in 1916, occurred in the midst of what has become known as World War I. The Charles Hayden Memorial Library was begun shortly after the end of World War II. Can there be any more or better proof of the real desire of the American people to reforge the sword of war into the plowshare of peace than the Charles Hayden Memorial Library, the most recent contribution of the institute to knowledge and understanding.