



THROUGH THE AGES

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“Who builds a church to God, and not to fame,
Will never mark the marble with his name”

—POPE



THE LIBRARY AT CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.

By WALTER DABNEY BLAIR

JEFFERSON was an admirer of Roman architecture and its tradition and in his plans for the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, Virginia, drew inspiration from its monumental buildings. His resources, however, were not equal to his aspirations and so he was compelled to make cornices, door and window architraves and pediments of wood, which in sections followed the scale of stone. He used wood, not in accordance with its own structure, but frankly in imitation of stone.

The difficulty of columns and pilasters was met by building them of brick which was afterwards stuccoed and given the proper entasis. The bases and capitals of columns were made of marble, which was imported from Italy, as neither material nor carvers were available at that time in Virginia.

In designing the Public Library for Charlottesville, which was the gift of Mr. Paul

Goodloe McIntire to his native city, it was decided, for reasons of economy, to follow the Jeffersonian tradition of using, for the main cornice of the building, wood in imitation of stone. The base courses, columns, pilasters, balusters and keystones were made of Georgia marble. As horizontal joints across the shaft of an unfluted column are disturbing to its unity and therefore to its decorative effect, the columns were made of monoliths. The additional cost over having them of horizontal drums was fully justified by æsthetic reasons. The capitals, of which the design required elaborate carving, had to be constructed in terra cotta, which in this particular instance so well stimulates marble that the average person does not realize the deception.

The plan of the building demanded a blank wall on the main façade, which faces west on a small park adorned with a fine equestrian statue of General Lee, by Shrady



The combination of brick and marble in the Charlottesville (Va.) Public Library is most effective.
The architect was Walter Dabney Blair, of New York.

and Lintelli, both park and monument also the gift of Mr. McIntire. The entrance from a sloping street presented an interesting problem and was solved by a semi-circular projecting porch, flanked by blank walls adorned by niches, in which large decorative vases of Georgia marble were placed. This porch is approached by marble steps which circle its flanks. The porch ceiling is decorated with recessed panels; and a semi-circular rinceau band of ornament surrounds a sunburst which serves the utilitarian purpose of ventilating the roof space.

On the south and east of the building there is a small garden with paved brick walks, seats and steps. Marble balustrades enclose it. In the center of the building is an elliptical recessed porch, with two monolith marble columns and two pilasters; marble steps 21 feet wide descend to the garden. The east wall of this garden has been built up somewhat higher in the center to form a background for a marble pedestal with a seat on each side.

The main entrance is an arched opening 16 feet high, the bottom of which is filled with side lights and double doors crowned by an ornamental frieze and a broken pediment. On the interior throughout the first floor the borders and bases of all the rooms were made of Black and Gold marble, the floors of cork. In the center of the delivery room a large and circular insert of Black and Gold marble reflects the domed ceiling above. The floor of the vestibule was made of colored marbles, Levanto, Verde Antique and Black and Gold, in a simple geometrical design.

The vestibule opens into the delivery room, which has a shallow decorated dome and rich modillioned cornice. This room is painted gray, while the reading room and vestibule are painted different shades of light yellow and tan.

The reading room, 23 feet wide by 40 feet long, has a ceiling height of 21 feet; it is lighted on the east by one window and on the north by three. These windows are wide and high, with circular heads, and are subdivided by muntins. Window shades, which are so hopelessly inartistic, have been replaced by ecru colored curtains, which give to the room an appearance different from the institutional aspect of the usual library. To emphasize this difference, Italian furniture of the eighteenth century, selected for its beauty of design, upholstered in linen, velvet, and tapestry, has been used and has been combined with old Colonial Windsor and painted chairs. The reading tables and paper racks are of walnut and were designed by the architect. The reading lamps have parchment shades decorated with colors to harmonize with and supplement the colors of the furnishings. The aim of the architect was to create an atmosphere of refinement and culture in a reading room which would entice and refresh the readers, with color, beautiful fabrics, and fine examples of furniture.

In the delivery room two console tables with tops of Formosa marble were designed by the architect so that the delightful color of that marble might be seen against gray painted walls.

This small one-story building is an example of how marble may be used in small amounts to give distinction and quality and charm of color to more ordinary building materials. It demonstrates that in small buildings, as in large and costly ones, marble has its legitimate use. Its presence adds a beauty otherwise unobtainable, a savour of legendary delights. In the colors of marble romance dwells. They are imagination's bridge back to the palaces of Sheba and Solomon and the great civilizations of the past.