

ADDRESS AT THE DEDICATION OF THE BEINECKE RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY

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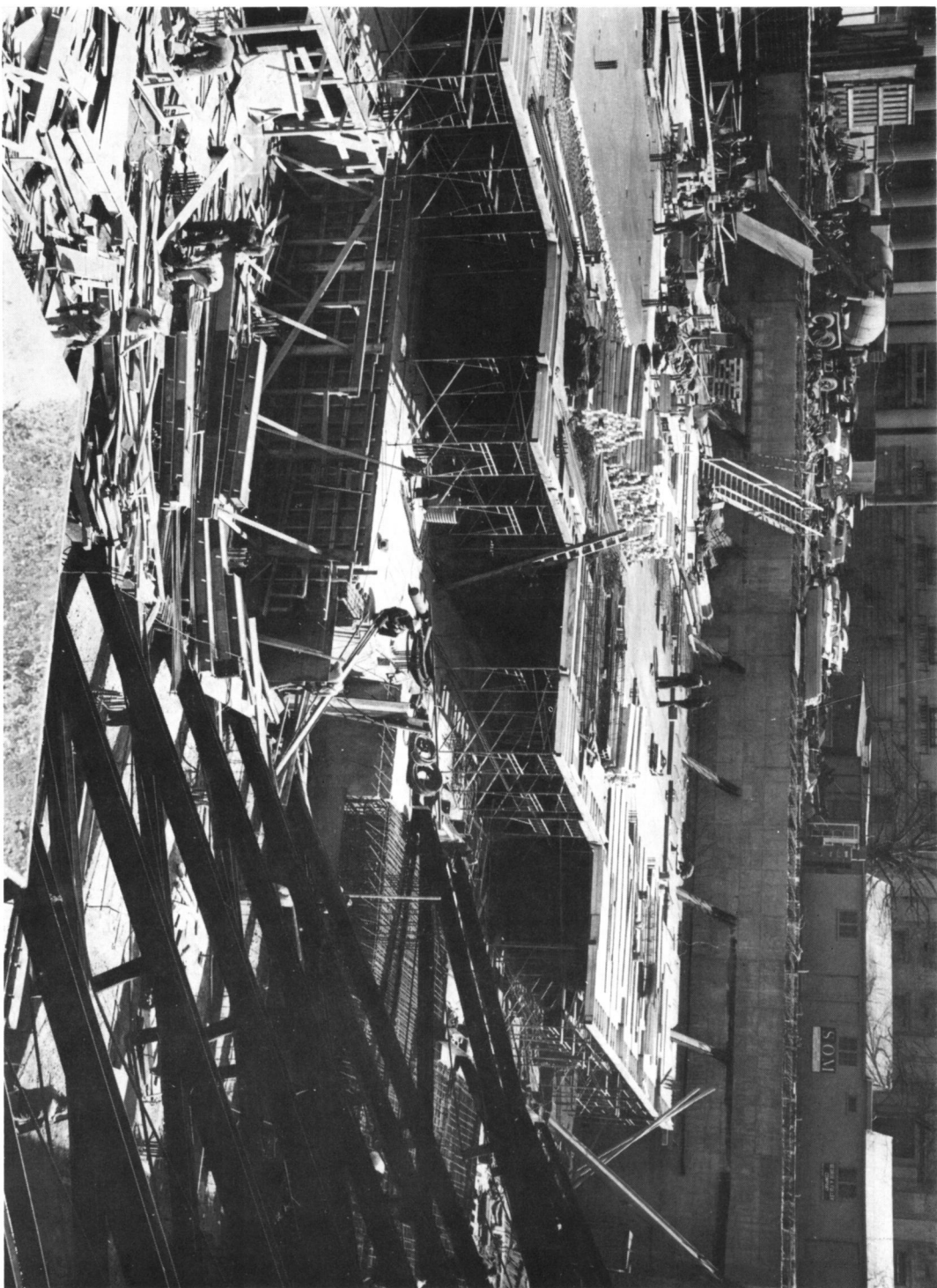
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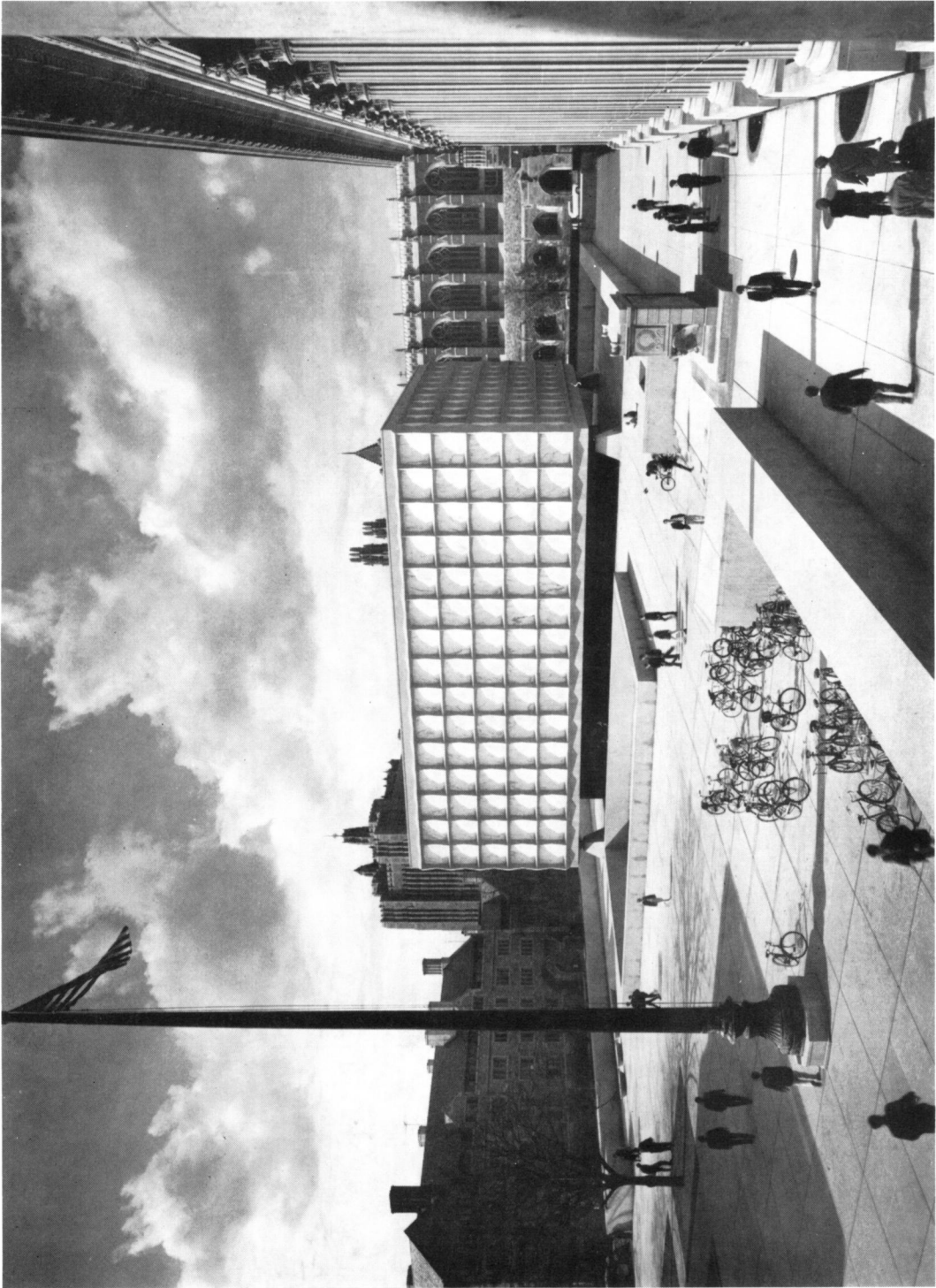


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ADDRESS AT THE DEDICATION OF THE
BEINECKE RARE BOOK AND MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY

By Wilmarth S. Lewis

Senior Fellow of the Yale Corporation

MR. BABB, Mr. Beinecke, Mr. Liebert, Ladies and Gentlemen—and the friends of this Library wherever they may be, a salutation that includes the entire Yale Library staff, Mrs. Edwin Beinecke, Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Beinecke, Mrs. Walter Beinecke, and all the Beinecke sons, daughters, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and in-laws. The Beineckes are not quite so numerous as the staff of the Yale Library, but on this occasion they are even more essential. If you would see their monument, look about you.

Yale is joined in honoring them by the preceding group of my salutation, the ladies and gentlemen. Nor would I stop with them. Today we should go back to the earlier friends of the Library, all the way back to 1701 to those who founded the College by laying their books on Pastor Russel's table at Branford, and we should single out for special mention Governor Yale, Jared Eliot, and Bishop Berkeley. I cannot do justice to the benefactors of the next two centuries who followed them, but shall come down to Washington's Birthday, 1924—the day when Yale took to the road that has brought us here this afternoon.

The chief speaker to the alumni that year was Professor Tinker. His subject was the Library. "There are three distinguishing marks of a university," he began, "a group of students, a corps of instructors,

and a collection of books." This was unfamiliar doctrine to most of his audience. Yale was about to spend several of the Sterling millions on a new library building, he pointed out, but nothing for books, binding, or service to readers. "If we are not willing to compete with the best libraries in this country," he went on, "it is folly for us to attempt to be one of the great universities, for scholars and teachers, graduate students, and, at last, undergraduate students will go where the books are." The Yale Library, he said frankly, was slipping from second into fifth or sixth place. It was to be hoped that the University's administration would arrest this decline and that the alumni would help them do it. What could individual graduates do? They could make themselves responsible for one of the weaker spots in the Library's collections and build it up. Mr. Tinker's suggestion was to result in Yale's being given vast numbers of important books and manuscripts, among which were our guest of honor's unrivaled collection of Stevenson, Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Beinecke's collection of Western Americana, including the Lewis and Clark papers, and Mr. Walter Beinecke Jr.'s collection of Barrie.

The immediate result of Tink's speech was that Frank Altschul formed, under the guidance of Mr. Keogh, the group that subsequently became the Yale Library Associates, a dozen Yale collectors of whom I was in every sense the junior. The Administration was alarmed by this new group, which was not only loyal and eager, but solvent. The Administration was alarmed because the drive for "a better not a bigger Yale" was being planned and, well, the hoped-for largesse must not be diverted from it. Fear of outside help for the Library persisted years after the drive was finished, but thanks to Mr. Altschul's patience and determination to help, it did not kill off alumni interest. In six years arrived a new Provost, Charles Seymour, and his wisdom and encouragement released the pent-up energies of Yale's bibliophiles. The Yale Library Associates was formed. Mr. Knollenberg built up our manuscript collections; Mr. Tinker, now Keeper of the Rare Book Room, was sought out by the leading booksellers of this country and London. When Mr. Knollenberg came I remember writing to him in terms that even then I suspected were a little excessive. An echo from Freshman English with C. B. Tinker came back to me: "Follow the gleam," we had read in Tenny-

son, and that is what I wrote to him. No doubt it was excessive, but it expressed the way those of us who were close to the Library felt about it then—and still do feel about it—because the Yale Library had become for us the heart and soul of the University.

And then J. T. Babb appeared. In the long history of libraries has there ever been his equal as a collector of collectors? For thirty years and more, as Secretary of the Associates, Associate Librarian, and Librarian, he has given himself to the ever-increasing splendor of this beloved institution. In his lifework we see singleness of purpose triumphant. He unites the ardor of the collector and the selflessness of the librarian whose motto is, "Consider that I labored not for myself only, but for all them that seek learning."

Having made it clear whom I am addressing, I shall now, more than halfway through my remarks, begin again: Mr. Babb, Mr. Beinecke, Mr. Liebert, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This great and moving occasion is the fulfillment of the hope expressed by Tink just forty years ago and fostered by all of us who believe that the welfare of Yale depends upon the welfare of its Library. In all the world is there a library building more beautiful, more thoughtfully designed, or more full of enchanting surprises than the one we are opening today? And how suitably it has been placed on our campus! South of us is Berkeley College, which honors one of the greatest of the Library's benefactors; west of us are the Sterling Library and the Law School, which is to say that we are backed by our parent and the law. North of us is the Commons to make it as easy as possible for our young men to nourish their minds here after they have nourished their bodies there. Finally, face to face with us on the east, small but awesome, stands the throne of might, majesty, dominion, and power—Woodbridge Hall!

Are we being naive in thinking that this Library's situation in the center of the University is important? I believe not. Nobody at Yale can be unaware of the Beinecke Library, and it will be a very incurious scholar indeed who will not venture inside it at least once. When he has seen how the skill of the architect has been united with the knowledge of the librarian, when he has explored the subterranean galleries with their miles of books that have made our civilization, I don't think we are being fanciful in picturing him looking at a book

and then, unless he remains on his guard, he just may become a bookman. There is no harm in exposing the University community, day in and day out, to this temptation.

Yale has come a long way from the time when a leading member of the faculty told President Hadley that the chief educational use of a university library is to lend an occasional book to a professor who does not happen to have that book on his own shelves. Yet not everyone realizes even now that the strength of a university is in proportion to the strength of its library. It is extraordinary how hard it is to grasp this elementary fact. We hear a great deal about "building up the humanities," but more about the need to do it than about how it can be done. It can only be done in a library, and we are today opening one that is superlative, outwardly and inwardly. The Beinecke Library is unabashedly for the best. It is filled with books and manuscripts that are needed for advanced studies. They have been brought here during the past two and a half centuries by the art of the collector and made accessible by the science of the librarian. One of the great book collections of the world will be housed in this building, which is worthy of it. Learning will flourish here and truth as well as light will filter through its walls.

We know from one of our more celebrated Yale songs that we shall "pass and be forgotten with the rest." This, alas, does seem to be the fate that most of us must expect; but, sir, it will not be your fate. As long as humane studies are pursued here and gratitude remains, you and your family will be held in honor at Yale. . . .

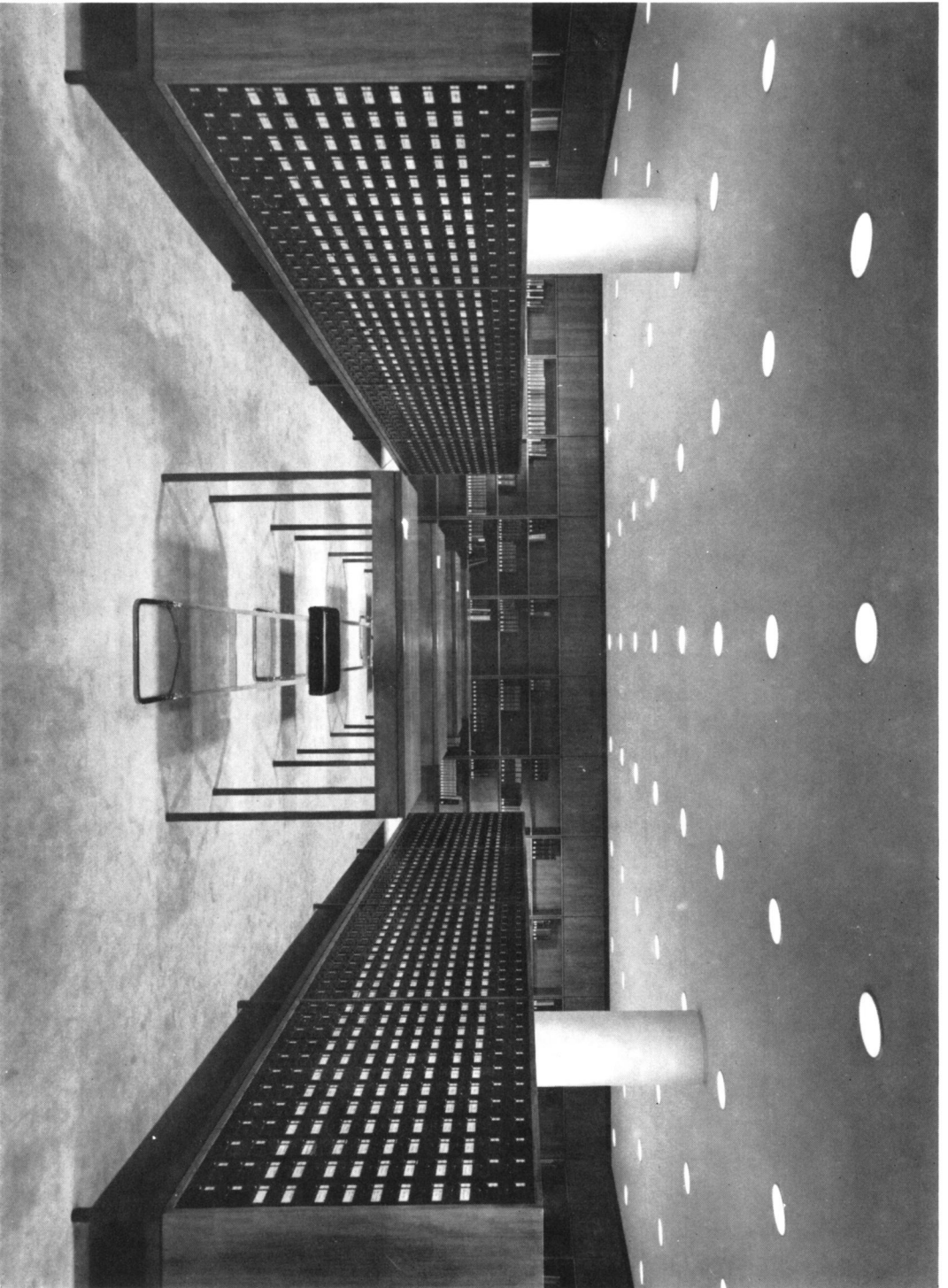
[From Mr. E. J. Beinecke, Mr. Lewis then accepted, on behalf of the Corporation, the key to the Beinecke Library and turned it over to the Librarian, Herman W. Liebert.]



Central Book Stack



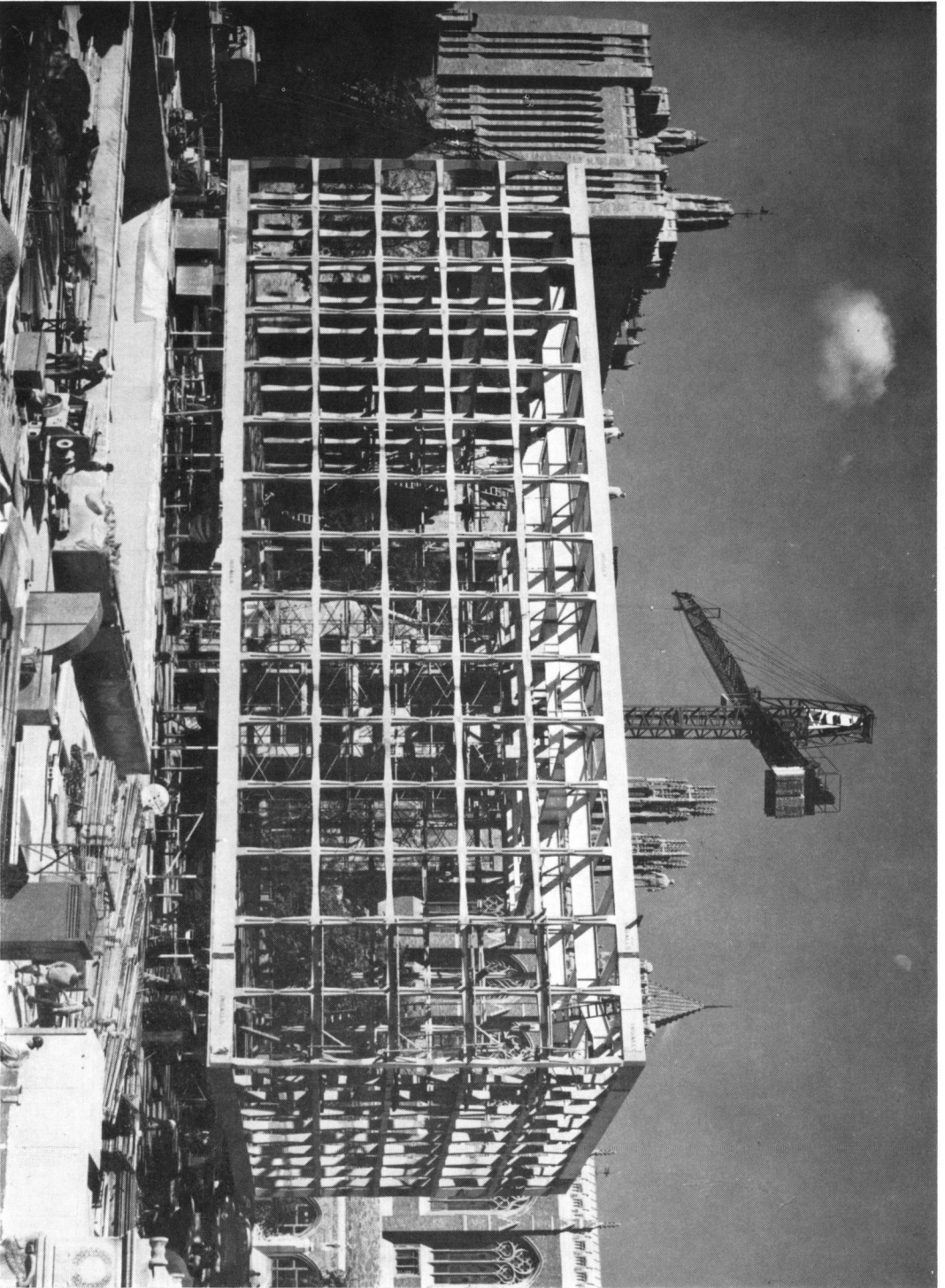
Reading Room



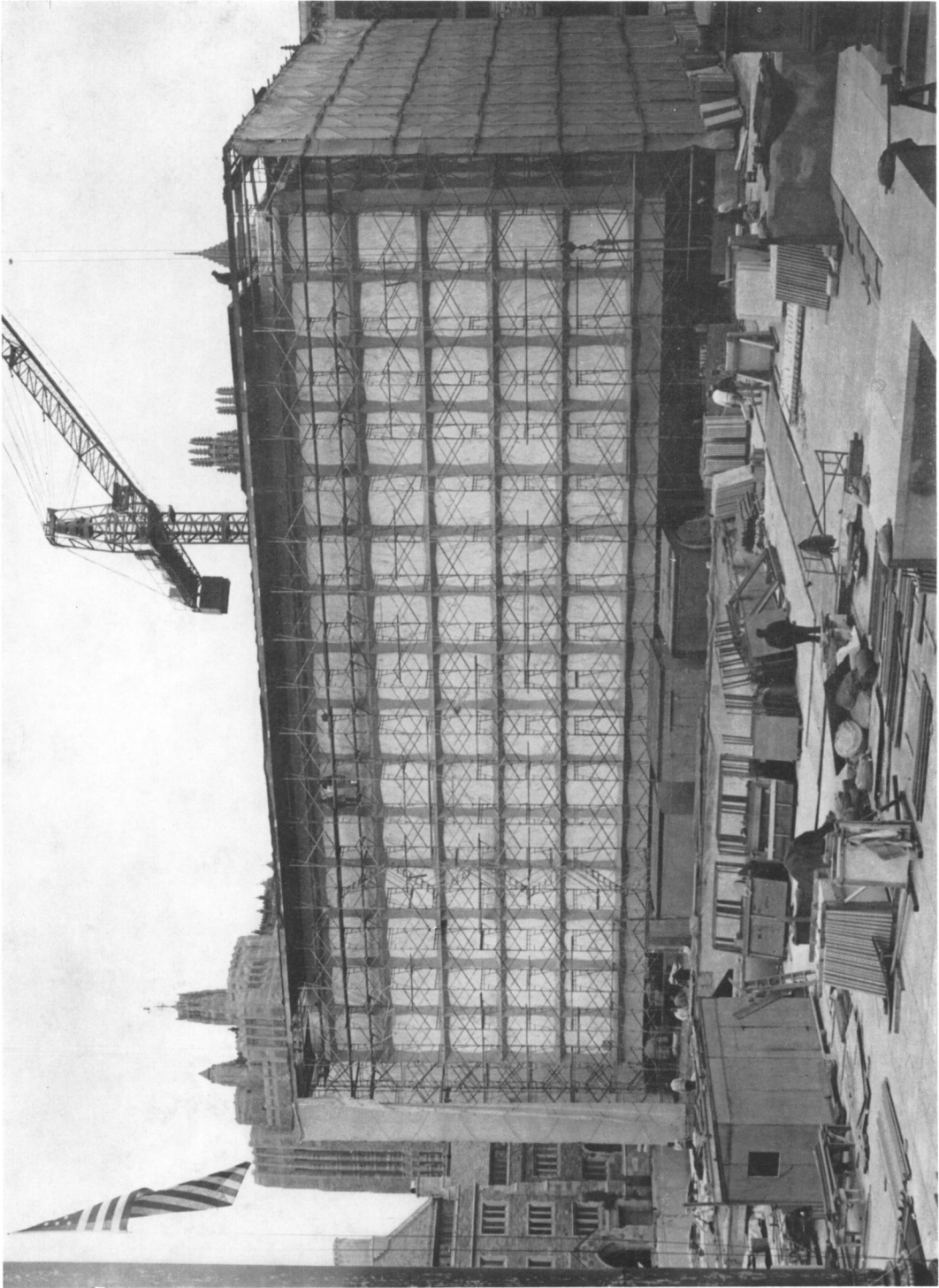
Catalogue Room



Curator's Office



18 October 1962



26 April 1963