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Taylor Hall In the Beginning

Mabel Lang
Bryn Mawr College

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BRYN MAWR COLLEGE

Emeritus Gatherings

TAYLOR HALL IN THE BEGINNING

Mabel Lang

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2

In the beginning there was (Fig. 1) Taylor Hall, and however often it has been mocked for its Gothic gaucherie, however many campus planning architects have recommended its removal, and however often it has suffered fire, flood and renovation, Taylor will go on and on, ever changing, truly protean despite its staid stateliness, ever ready to adapt to fresh demands with an "off with the old and on with the new" kind of abandon somewhat at odds with its stern profile.

Fathered and funded in August 1879 by Dr. Joseph W. Taylor, after five years gestation and a cost of \$121,199, Taylor Hall sprang (Fig. 2) full-armed in 1884 as a fitting exemplar of Quaker aesthetic in Victorian perpendicular style: 130 feet long and 130 feet high. In the beginning Taylor was all things to all Bryn Mawrtys, except for mere physical matters like bed and board in Merion Hall and the cult of the body in the very first 1882 gym. (And incidentally we should take note that we are already well into the second roof of our third gymnasium while this first administration and classroom building goes on forever.)



Fig. 3

We have all known Taylor Hall at one stage or another during some part of its very checkered history as heart and nerve-center of the College. But for its earliest days, (Fig. 3) long since become mythical, a little research in the archives was necessary. In the beginning Taylor housed all the administration, all the library, all the laboratories, and all the classrooms - all this in addition to the all-college assembly hall or chapel. But a rapidly expanding student body meant change, and the building had to begin to learn how to adapt, as function followed form and form followed function. Just think that in 1893 when the College was only eight years old the student body had more than quadrupled from the beginning 35 undergraduates and 7 graduate students to a total of 193 students, with a faculty of 32 and three additional residence halls. No wonder that already in 1888 there had appeared in the Catalogue this plea: "It is the wish of the Trustees to transfer the scientific departments of the College to a new building. Taylor Hall will soon be entirely occupied by the library and by the remaining departments; and it is suggested to all persons that wish to bestow gifts on the College to contribute to the \$50,000 needed for a new science building."



Fig. 4

And so it was that the laboratories were the first to leave, even though Dalton's not-quite-finished state in 1893 meant that many of the Biology specimens had to be temporarily stored in Taylor basement along with the coal. So Chemistry vacated its suite of five rooms (lecture, laboratory, preparation, balance and library) all set up in what we know as Room F. (Fig. 4) Here you see the laboratory corner with the two windows facing Thomas Library, and you recognize perhaps the moldings and the way the blinds or shutters are tucked away into the window frames. I think that the instructor is at the left; everyone else seems busy with book or microscope. This other (Fig. 5) more anonymous shot seems to be in an inside corner. The aim, according to an early catalogue, was "to give students a thorough and systematic knowledge of chemical phenomena and a clear conception of the relations existing between observed facts and



Fig. 5





Fig. 6

chemical phenomena and a clear conception of the relations existing between observed facts and the general theories of the science." For the first couple of years Chemistry had hosted Physics equipment, but then a small two-room frame building near Merion served as Physics lab and lecture room.



Fig. 7

Biology too vacated a similar suite on Taylor's third floor which included both botanical and biological specimens and where all students were expected to make dissections of typical forms illustrating the leading groups of animals and plants. (Fig. 6) Here you might recognize the characteristic Taylor ceiling of a room in the NE corner with its door leading out into the corridor and an opening into the preparation room beyond. I could find no plan showing laboratories in Taylor but this plan (Fig. 7) from 1894 after the laboratories had moved to Dalton will show the basic layout of Taylor's north wing on at least the first two floors: two large rooms, one at East, one at West, each with five windows and a fireplace, and one narrow room between with two windows. On the first floor (top) this narrow room was part of the library, then became a professor's interview room for a short time before becoming the two faculty cloakrooms that I think are still extant. On the second floor the middle room was at some point incorporated into F and the wall replaced by pillars, perhaps for the largest classes and of course for Faculty meetings. Note there that the entrance to what we know as Room G was directly on the corridor; later, in our day, after the fire doors were installed at the top of the stairs, G's door is off a kind of vestibule of Room F. I wonder if any of you go back far enough to remember stumbling over bodies crouched by that door with ears to the crack in an effort to hear Arthur Colby Sprague on Shakespeare - since he allowed no one to enter once he had started his lecture.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

But going back to 1894, the third floor (bottom) shows the way in which the library's abhorrence of the vacuum left by the departing laboratories resulted in an adaptation of space that prefigured the later Thomas Library plan of intermingling books, seminaries, and faculty offices. Here were Classics, Foreign Languages, and (Fig. 8) Mathematics, cheek by jowl with professors' rooms and even a professors' reading room.



Fig. 11

On the third floor of Taylor's south wing, over the President's office, which, by the way, is the only constant in this building of constantly changing functions, was the History and Politics seminary (Fig. 9) with the rectangular pillar performing the same function as the columns in Room F.



Fig. 12

The Library (Fig. 10) proper continued where it had started on the first floor of the North Wing in what we know as Rooms D and E and the faculty johns. In the first catalogue the library was advertised as comprising 2200 bound volumes but here (Fig. 11) in 1894 it had grown to 13,324. In the first year the library was listed as open for 11 hours a day; but by the second year Bryn Mawr students had made themselves felt and it was open for 14 hours (from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.).



Fig. 13

Not part of the Library (Fig. 12) but a kind of lecture room plus laboratory was this combination of Art and Archaeology, which is easy to locate, since its setting is one of the very few rooms in Taylor that has never been anything but a class room, that is, Room B - which you can still recognize by the rather odd structure in the SW corner more or less balancing the still extant fireplace in the NW corner. I think it may have screened some of the heat-carrying flues which we are told did not draw well when the wind was in the NNW. The elaborate gas light fixtures help to date this picture, since the College did not become electrified till 1903 after oil lamps had been responsible for the Denbigh fire. At any rate, Art and Archaeology too, along with the books, deserted Taylor when the Library, not named Thomas till 1935, was completed in 1907, but that is another story.



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

The departure of both laboratories and the library with its seminaries and reading rooms did release some space for classrooms, as you see (Fig. 13) here in the 1907 plan: D and E on the first floor were added to F and G on the second floor and H, K and L on the third. But there was still the Assembly Room or Chapel, filling both second and third floors in the whole central





Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

still the Assembly Room or Chapel, filling both second and third floors in the whole central section of the building (Fig. 14). You may recognize the windows on the right as those on the building's west side (the one that faces Thomas); the doors at the front lead into the corridor outside the President's office; and nothing that you may have known in the mid-section of the second floor then existed. It was here that the opening ceremony of the College took place at 3 p.m. September 23, 1885 with Trustees, President, Dean, 11 faculty, and visiting dignitaries including James Russell Lowell, President Chase of Haverford and President Gilman of Johns Hopkins sat on the platform with students in the front rows and parents and other visitors behind. And it continued as the very heart of the College, not only with daily chapel but also for all-college functions both academic and extracurricular. But with the rapid growth of the College, it soon became too small for any occasion involving an outside audience, so that it was only with the building of the second gymnasium (revised into the present Campus Center) in 1909, the College's 25th year, that Commencements and other occasions could be appropriately celebrated, and plays and other performances could be properly appreciated by a variety of audiences.

Meanwhile, there were other matters of concern about Taylor Hall. On December 10, 1914 the following editorial appeared in the *College News*: "Shall we have a decapitated Taylor? Shall we be glad or sorry if the Building Committee agrees with the Dean of Montana in thinking that the top of the tower should be removed just as the copper begins?" I interrupt here (Fig. 15) to show a picture that seems to illustrate the horrid possibility, though why or how it might ever have been taken I can not imagine. To continue with the editorial: "Will it look as though Taylor was kicking one leg in the air, in rivalry with the four (Fig. 16) the Elephant Library kicks? To speak soberly, could Taylor ever look early Jacobean?"

I have said nothing so far of what seems to be a square excrescence on Taylor's otherwise symmetrical and shapely plan: that is, what was once the (Fig. 17) student cloakroom on the first floor (from which long since a room has been split off to serve as an office of one sort or another and later as a meeting room); what on the second floor did not become the Dean's office till about 1915 but had been College Records in the 'nineties and the Stenographers Room in the early years of the twentieth century; and what on the third floor has had an even more checkered career as professors' reading room, classroom, Public Information, Events, etc. The special character of this square excrescence is clear from its graduated roof line barely seen here (Fig. 18) from the southeast. We shall hear more of it later but it seems right to mention it now because of its asymmetry and because its association for all of us with the Dean's office might have led you to think that you detected the masterful hand of the first Dean and second President in the very planning of Taylor Hall, despite the fact that she never occupied it.

Moving on in time, we find in the November 27th, 1920 *College News* an article headed: "Busts in Taylor Come to Life for the Class of 1919's Reception to Freshmen." The story goes, "The long abused Greeks who adorn (Fig. 19) the corridors of Taylor came into their own last Saturday evening forming an original and well-executed background to the familiar theme of Bryn Mawr superwomen . . ."

More worrisome was the February 25, 1925 *College News* account of an address by President Park to the alumnae at the Bellevue-Stratford about recent information from the insurance company of new stringent fire laws which cut down the seating capacity of both the chapel in Taylor and the Gym, leaving the College with no place for public events, although Haverford's president kindly offered the use of Roberts Hall. Miss Park is reported to have said: "In Taylor Hall it was formerly possible to seat 350, but adherence to the law will cut that to 290, scarcely more than half the College...How the problem of announcing the European Fellowship to an eager College will be solved is as yet unknown. Commencement has two solutions - to radically reduce the invitations or to take the fearful chance of clear weather and use the cloisters." These very real concerns about a suitable auditorium, new needs of the Music Department, and generations of students' work for May Day toward a student-activities building all combined to





Fig. 21

generations of students' work for May Day toward a student-activities building all combined to increase the pace of both planning and fund-raising for what was to become Goodhart. So finally it was on May 2, 1928 that the *College News* proudly announced: "The Seventh Big May Day coincides with the completion of the student-activities building, Goodhart Hall, the raising of a fund for which was the original *raison d'être* of the festival."

But even as they celebrated the 28 years of toil creating paper flowers, of worry over oxen, and of endless rehearsals, the reporters were looking forward to a new and refurbished Taylor, reporting that (quote) "the central part of Taylor Hall (Fig. 20) is to be entirely rebuilt during the summer so that the class of '32 arriving next fall will never know that where they hold their classes and interviews with their teachers was once a chapel large enough to accommodate the entire college.....that the new classrooms would have long tables and chairs instead of the wibbly-wobbly desks. They went on to report that there would be an outer office in which students waiting for an appointment with the Dean could sit instead of having to roost on the stairs to the third floor outside her door, and of course that a ceiling would be put in, creating a third floor which could be used as storage space. Indeed, this last was done but since it provided firm footing only, for example, in the huge closet where caps and gowns were stored, students sitting in the Dean's outer office one day in the late '40's were somewhat startled to see a leg come through the ceiling - no less a leg than that of the President's secretary who had stepped unwarily beyond the solid flooring above.

This 1929 plan not only of the second floor but also of the third will be familiar to many of you who taught in Taylor in the years before the '70's, with rooms K, L and M on the west side of the second floor. But classroom N on the east side will have been absorbed by the Director in Residence already in the '40's. And on the third floor in addition to R, S, and T some will remember the rooms, here designated Alumnae, as classrooms U and V, but that happened only when the Alumnae moved out to the Deanery in 1937 after Miss Thomas' death. Those happy few will also remember the Comptroller's office under the President's on the first floor.

As you have already observed, Taylor's history is one of removals, whether of laboratories or alumnae, books or audiences, and yet no removal met with the same outcry or impacted so tragically as the one first mooted in an editorial in the *College News* of December 1, 1937. I quote: "Another tradition of the brave Victorian era at Bryn Mawr is about to topple. Mr. Francis L. Stokes is planning to remove the busts from Taylor. (Fig. 21) He feels that by modern standards these pieces of statuary are not beautiful or even attractive, and so he has condemned them....We feel most strongly that Mr. Stokes' efforts to modernize and beautify Taylor will be barren. Our belief is that Taylor is basically and structurally ugly. But the style of architecture, while aesthetically unpleasing, does not hurt our eyes. We are just sentimental enough to appreciate Taylor for its quaintness, and to us the busts, far too large for their pedestals, severely glistening from every corner, present an effect which is to us the very apotheosis of the uncompromising individualism expressed by the whole building. We are not of a mind to deprive further generations of Bryn Mawr freshmen from a healthy astringent shock on first setting foot in Taylor. Taylor can never be called distinguished architecturally. Now at least it is distinguished by busts. Helpless students who wonder feebly which is Taylor can be tersely directed to it: "The place with the busts." And besides being of beauty as landmarks, they have a certain lamppost utility. Where will posters hang if Juno is removed? Where will we hang after grueling classes if we are deprived of Marcus Aurelius' marble shoulder?"



Fig. 22

Two weeks later the *College News* reported returns from 151 cards sent out to faculty and staff stating: "I approve the proposal to remove the busts from Taylor. Yes No." The headline reads: "Questionnaire Elicits Answers from Only Half: 32 Pro 33 Con, 9 Neutral. Replies Show Emotion, Wit, and Compromise." And the story starts: "Although the cards distinctly said Check and Sign, 23 were returned anonymously... Miss Park wrote: Yes, in summer, as an experiment." Of the other answers quoted I must limit myself to my two favorites: Mr. Carpenter's "I think these busts are almost the worst I have ever seen, and I heartily approve of retaining them." The



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

these busts are almost the worst I have ever seen, and I heartily approve of retaining them." The other was: "Miss Stapleton, who never looks at questionnaires, does not feel strongly on the question; but she confessed to our reporter that if she did have an opinion, she would probably oppose the busts' removal."



Fig. 25

That the busts were removed seems clear from a March 22, 1939 headline: "Degraded busts share Taylor basement with sink and ecclesiastical portraits" I think we are told that some ended up in the basement of the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, but perhaps some of you will remember a couple in the Nahm's garden, and certainly Hera is still with us under Canaday's steps.

Alas, no picture exists to illustrate the next gem from the *College News*, dated November 17, 1943: "Chinese Bell Near Room B in Taylor; Vague Opinions on Origin; Purpose Unknown.. Although it looks like part of the heating system, it really is a Chinese bell.... The bell's history is shrouded in mystery - nobody seems to know its why and wherefore....Faculty opinion on the subject ranged from Mrs. Manning's faint remembrance that it had been rung occasionally, probably for fire drills, to Mrs. Chadwick-Collins' assertion that she definitely had no memory of the bell's having been rung on any occasion during her years at Bryn Mawr. Miss MacDonald cleared the situation by saying it was used before morning chapel in the days when services were held in Taylor." I skip several other more speculative comments to give you the News' conclusion: "But the bell is not fully appreciated, for the proverb written thereon is very applicable to college life. As translated by Julia Kuo-Fang Ling and Margaret Krenz the symbols say, 'Give and take in the midst of tribulations for heaven is full of saintly courts.'" The News continues: "May passers-by - the faculty, prepared to give, and the students, prepared to take - remember this optimistic sentiment."



Fig. 26

There is, alas, also no photograph of Taylor tower's bell, but because it has inspired both theft and poetry I must include here at least its outward symbol (Fig. 22). The theft was of its clapper, stolen for obvious reasons and later found in the Archaeology Museum labelled "petrified Neanderthal tibia". The poetry is from 1903 Tipyn o' Bob, a college literary magazine:



Fig. 27

"Said the Bell up in Taylor's tall tower,
I feel that I'm really a power,
Though I think it a sin
To be always roped in
Yet I'm surely the Belle of the Hour."



Fig. 28

Because the next Taylor Hall item from the *College News*, even though heavily excerpted, might cause concern about its well-being, I have slipped in here slides showing it safe and sound at various dates and seasons. (Fig. 23) January 22, 1947: "Firemen, Hoses Invade Taylor to Extinguish Mysterious 'Blaze'. Clutching his lunchbox to his breast, Mr. Herben heroically pushed his way through clouds of smoke and screaming girls to safety behind the green and gleaming fire-engines.... Professors rushed through the crowds toward the library, some balancing tea-trays, others shuffling loose pages.... Crowds (Fig. 24) gathered, speculation backed by cash began. Rain drizzled into the interested mouths of the bettors...Where was the fire?...Several hundred feet of hose were unwound from the trucks and disappeared through the door of Taylor. ...Evacuees reported smoke in the corridors....Communiques from the front reported doubtful progress...Finally, the fire had been traced to its source, a fuse box had ignited some lumber carelessly left on its top....Cheers were given and Miss McBride was voted Speaker of the Day: 'Why don't we all go home to lunch?' she said."



Fig. 29

From now on the *College News* shows no interest in Taylor Hall, and when it really burned partially down, College was not in session. Only from the *Alumnae Bulletin* do we learn of that catastrophe when Miss McBride reported (Fig. 25) how on July 6, 1961 flames had engulfed mostly the third floor of the square excrescence that I pointed out earlier, how much of the

mostly the third floor of the square excrescence that I pointed out earlier, how much of the building was flooded, how the administration moved into Pembroke East; how 617 truckloads of rubble were removed, how the whole was rebuilt by September, but despite careful study of photographs of the roofline we saw earlier, a plain roof seemed less complicated both architecturally and financially.

We started off with a Taylor Hall that, as it lost laboratories, books, a chapel, and even an Alumnae Office, thereby gained classrooms for an increasing number of students. But more students and increasing services and specialization meant at the same time increasing administration and more offices, so that there were incomers as well as outgoers, and as the years went by incomers expanded and moved from one space to another and then later deserted for greener pastures elsewhere. It's almost an endless list, so I'll give you only a sample, spicing it up with some random shots of Taylor very properly under renovation, but most of you will also be picturing for yourselves each particular entity or office as you once knew it

First there was the Bookshop, started as a Cooperative Society in Taylor basement in 1929, moving out in 1955 to Taylor Annex, then to Thomas in '69, to Rockefeller in '78, and to the Campus Center in '85. Also in 1929 an office variously known as Public Relations, Publications, or Public Information started out on Floor 1 by the front door and then went to Floor 2 in classroom N in the late '30's, only to move up to Floor 3 in the '70's, first in the south wing and later in the north wing (and now, of course, flown to the Gateway). (Fig. 26) Also in 1929 what was then known as the Bureau of Recommendations (and later became Career Planning and then Career Development) started out on floor 2, moved to floor 3 in '31, was then on both floors from '42 to '55, moved to the basement in '55, then back up to floor 1 in '58 and finally to Thomas in '85. Admissions was a new office in 1940 replacing the office of Secretary and Registrar and it operated on floor 2 in the tower and adjacent office till '58 when it took over floor 1's south wing when the Comptroller's office went to Cartref. (You don't really want to know how the Comptroller had taken over from the Bursar who started on floor 2 and moved down when the library left in 1907.) (Fig. 27) In 1941 a section of the basement was fixed up and made available to the Maids' Bureau where students often had curtains made or dresses fitted. Later occupants of the basement include Financial Aid from '75 to '85, the Copy Center from '73, Security from '80 to '88, and Special Events from '81 to '85.

That is a fair sample of incomers to Taylor, but it is the outgoers I want especially to note, showing as they do Taylor's nature as a seedbed, as it were, of functions and operations which, having been given a start there, grew up and out elsewhere. I hesitate to speak of Taylor as womb-like in nature since that might imply that those administrators who never left were not ready for the real world, since we all know how utterly adult all our Presidents and Deans have been. Of outgoers, in addition to Bookshop, Career Development and Comptroller going to new homes elsewhere, Admissions found more spacious quarters in Ely House in 1980, the Post Office went first to Merion, then to the Campus Center; Resources departed to Helfarian; the Division of General Studies decamped to Canwyll House; Security (now Public Safety) took over Merion basement; and Financial Aid went to Helfarian Annex to snuggle up to the fund-raisers.

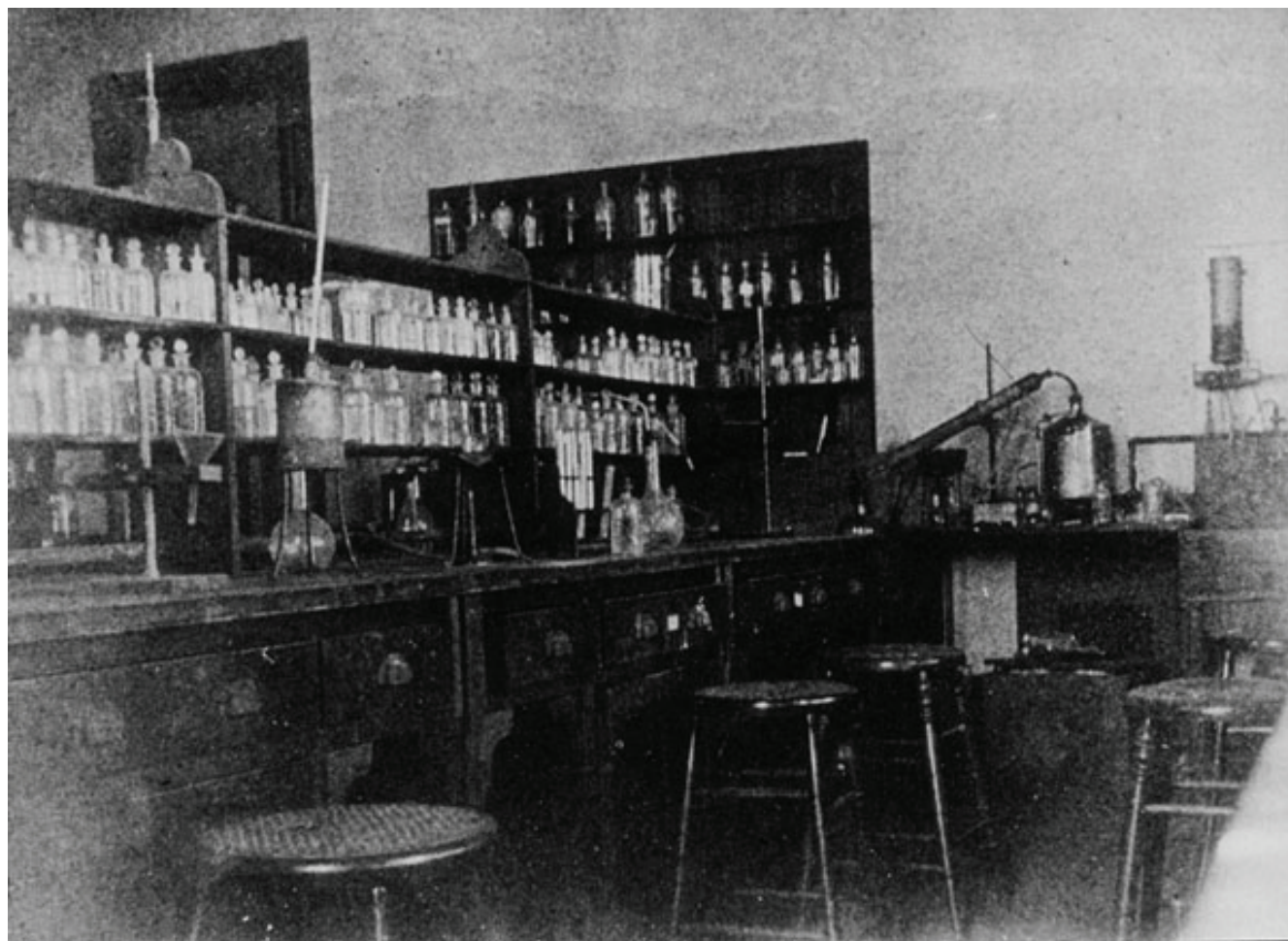
Taylor Hall has indeed been almost all things at one time or another to almost all Bryn Mawtirs, but it has a few roles still to play, for like Cleopatra, age can not wither nor custom stale its infinite variety. Thus Taylor's most recent fling was in the movie business. It was its look of genuine antiquity that attracted makers of a movie called "Wide Awake" to use its classrooms and corridors (Fig. 28) a few years ago for scenes in a boys' school called St. Mark's Academy. The plot involved ten-year old Joshua looking for God to ask why his grandfather had to die and various school scenes in which his quest awakens him to real life. Definitely a new experience for old Taylor!

On that note of renewed (Fig. 29) youth and eternal springtime, let us in the words of a once

On that note of renewed (Fig. 29) youth and eternal springtime, let us in the words of a once popular travelogue say farewell to a building that despite its inner inconstancy remains a monument to the College's founder and a symbol of Bryn Mawr aspirations



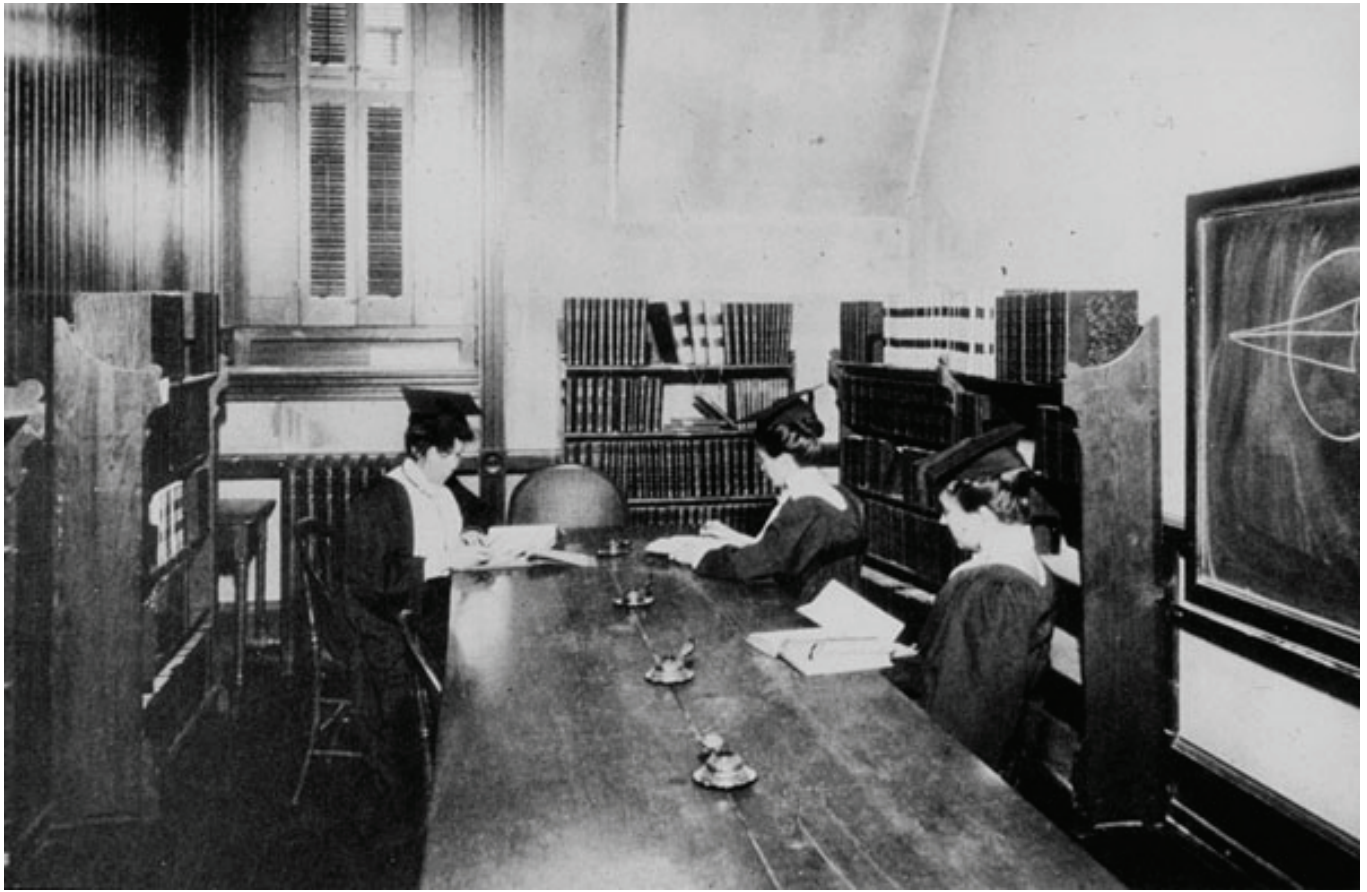




TAYLOR HALL
CENTRAL ACADEMIC BUILDING

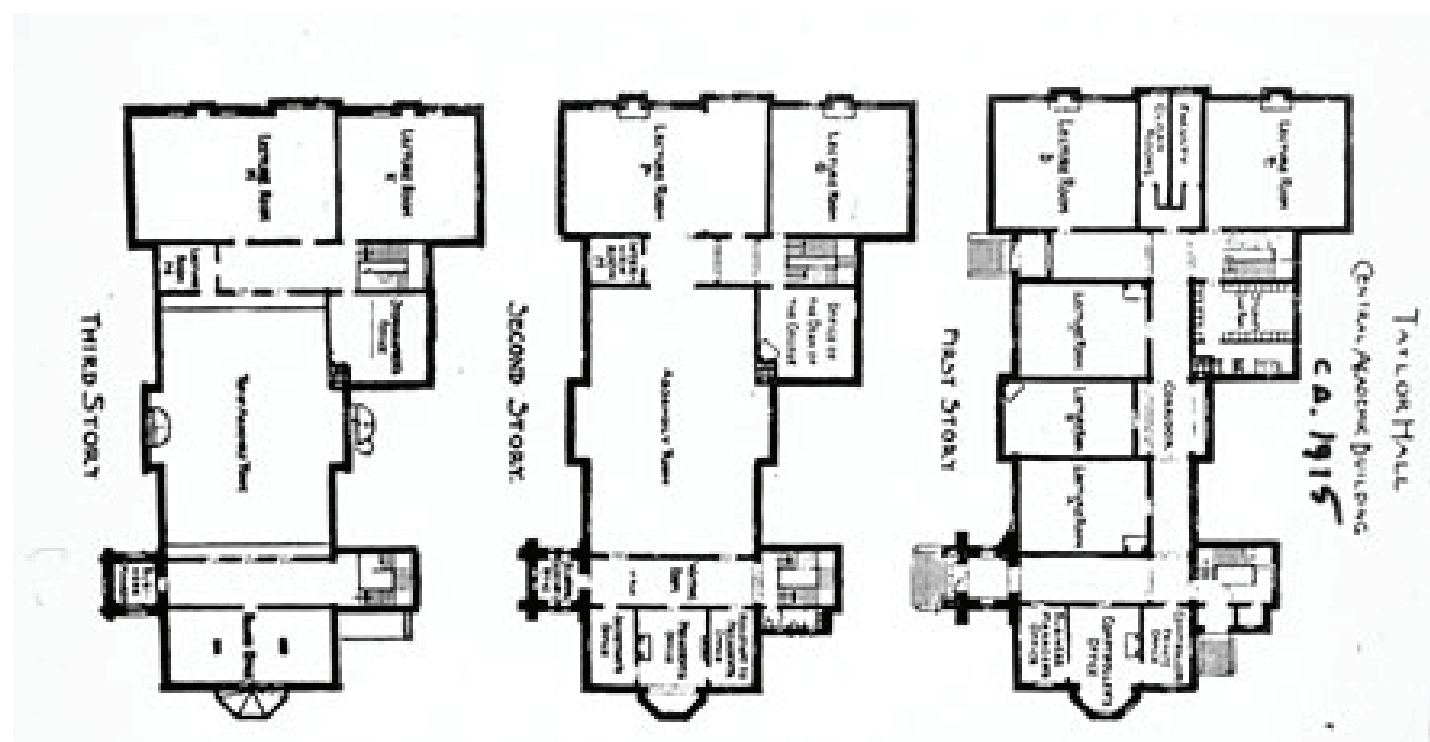
1894







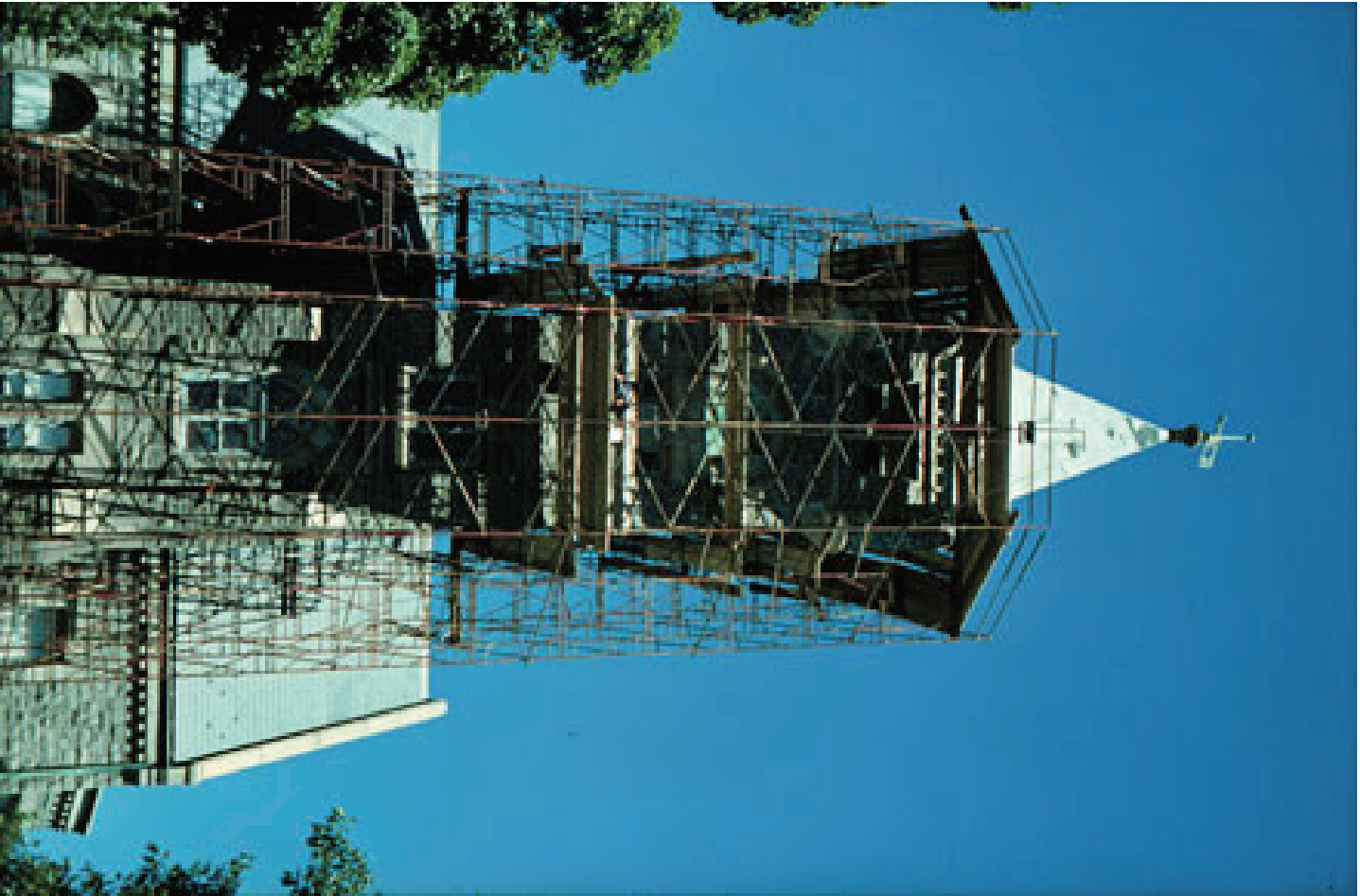












TAYLOR HALL

CENTRAL ACADEMIC BUILDING

