

# A Square Peg

to Fit a

Round Hole

by William W. Wells Jr.

The University of Maine School of Law's library, located in Portland, Maine, is quite an unusual building; it has been accurately described as resembling a wedding cake. It is a round building that is seven-stories tall. The first two floors are larger than the five upper floors, giving the tiered look of a wedding cake.

The floors are arranged in a series of concentric circles. The interior circle contains the utilities. The next circle has meeting rooms and/or library space. Carrel space for students or office space for faculty and staff is located along the outer circle of windows. Because the first floor contains classrooms, only the second and third floors are structurally able to hold book stacks. In 1988 the library reached the point where it needed more space to serve the community adequately. But such a unique facility presents design difficulties.

We intended to expand to one of the upper floors until we discovered that the upper floors could not hold the books without major structural renovation. This was not feasible because the renovations would have placed support columns in the middle of classrooms. This left us with a single option: to build an addition.

As with all similar projects, we had ideas and plans for a significant improvement of the library and law school layout. However, fiscal reality required us to abandon these plans and to build what was essentially a box for books. Despite this disappointment, a functional and attractive addition was designed and built.

The addition is a three-floor building connected to the main library through the second and third floors via a walkway or bridge. A first-floor entrance was omitted to provide as much security for the collection

as possible without having to establish a second occupied service point. Integrating this simple structure into the shelving scheme of the existing round main library space provided difficult.

After a lot of trial and error to somehow make a sensible shelving design by continuing the collection run from one floor of the round building into the same floor of the rectangle, we decided to abandon that idea. There was no way to do it without confusing the users, not to



mention the staff. This left us with only one solution. We had to identify discreet areas of the collection and place them on separate floors.

We isolated the Canadian and British materials by Library of Congress call numbers. Luckily each of these discreet collections was the size of one of the floors and left room to place carrels around the windowed perimeter. The British materials were placed on the first floor of the addition and the Canadian materials were

A University of Maine student takes advantage of the quiet reading room in the new addition to the main library.



We took advantage of the second floor to provide an attractive small reading room for students and attorneys.

The collection on this floor contains the primary materials and treatises for the six New England states. This space provides a quiet place for the people who need to work with these materials. The reading area contains artwork required by a state-mandated program to have a piece of art in all state building projects.

In 1993 we held the formal dedication. The addition was intended to serve our needs for seven to 10 years. This estimate was right on target.

We are now investigating our options for the future. The advent of online resources has added new options to consider. We will be taking advantage of technology by eliminating or storing materials that are duplicated by the online materials. The format change may save space while providing similar or easier access to the materials.

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