U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

EARLY BUILDING OPERATIONS

by

B. T. Galloway

ooOoo

Extracts from notes entitled "Some Recollections and Comments Relating to the Evolution of the U. S. Department of Agriculture."

ooOoo

MISCELLANY

Some Recollections and Comments Relating to the Evolution of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

These recollections and comments have been set down from time to time without regard to consecutive dates or time periods. They are glimpses of work and workers connected with the evolution of a branch of the Federal Government with which I have been associated for nearly 50 years. - B. T. Galloway.

EARLY BUILDING OPERATIONS

It came about that the present East and West Wings of the main Administration Building of the Department of Agriculture were the first structures authorized after the appointment of a Park Commission. This body came into existence in 1901 in accordance with a resolution sponsered by the late Senator McMillan. The Park Commission submitted a voluminous report on a plan for the improvement of the entire park system of the District of Columbia. The Park Commission consisted of Daniel H. Burnhan of Chicago, Frederick L. Olmstead of Brookline, Massachusetts, and Charles F. McKim of the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White, New York.

The Department buildings were authorized in February, 1903, and Secretary Wilson asked me to serve as chairman of a committee to look after all matters relating to the location and construction of the building or buildings. The other members of the committee were Dr. D. E. Salmon, Chief of the Bureau of Animal Industry, and Dr. A. C. True, Chief of the Office of Experiment Stations. The full records of the work of this committee will be found in offi-

cially published documents, chiefly five annual reports which I prepared and submitted to the Secretary.

Being the first buildings planned for erection on the Mall we found ourselves at once confronted with a good many difficult problems regarding location and other matters. Conditions were further complicated by the fact that the Congress at that time, and especially members of the House Appropriations' Committee, were more or less hostile to the elaborate and costly plans of the Park Commission. The Park Commission, however, was fully supported by President Roosevelt who was in thorough sympathy with the great scheme for the beautification of Washington and the surrounding territory. When authorization was secured for an appropriation of one-and-a-half million dollars for the Agricultural Department building or buildings certain influential Congressmen indicated that there was no necessity for the erection of classical marble structures and that we could get far more room for the money appropriated by constructing good types of commercial buildings of brick and terra cotta. The Park Commission, however, was opposed to the erection of any such structures on the Mall and were further opposed to the encroachment on the Mall of any buildings except as planned for the greater improvement of that part of the city.

After much discussion and many tedious delays it was at last decided to erect buildings on the south side of the Mall and far enough back to the south so that no encroachment would be made on the Mall proper. Before reaching this point, however, we had difficulty with the first architects. These architects had won a competition which with the aid of the Supervising Architect of the

Treasury we had conducted a year or two previous under authority from Congress. An appropriation of $5,000 was made for this work. The building approved by the committee of architects was a beautiful structure but not designed to meet our urgent needs for laboratory work. We asked the architects, Lord and Hewlett of New York, to revise their plans and to consider the erection of two wings with the idea that eventually we should obtain authority to erect a central structure and later extend our buildings to the south across B Street. The architects refused to do this and the Secretary discharged them and we then secured the services of Rankin, Kellogg and Crane, of Philadelphia, who fell in with our wishes and immediately began work preparing plans for two separate structures designed primarily for laboratory use.

After complying with the wishes of the Park Commission in locating the buildings south of the Mall line, it was decided to center the Administration Building on 13th Street. We had secured the services of Capt. John S. Sewell, of the Engineer Corps of the U. S. Army, to advise and assist us in our work. Captain Sewell made it a point to keep in touch with the Park Commission at all times so as to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. Early in 1904 we began construction work on our buildings and after expending about $18,000 for excavations we were informed by the Park Commission that we should not have centered our structures on 13th Street, as this was contrary to the plans for the improvements on the Mall. We were further informed that the Administration Building when erected should be placed in the center of the Department grounds, which would place it considerably further west than 13th Street.

Naturally this decision of the Park Commission coming after we thought all matters with them had been adjusted aroused the Secretary and also some of the leading members of the House who got wind of what was going on. Our work was stopped for a while. In the meantime influential Senators were besieging the President urging him to have us comply with the Park Commission's instructions and plans. Now we want to record two episodes for which the foregoing is more or less of a background - episodes showing the resourcefulness and human side of President Roosevelt.

One day at a Cabinet meeting he called Secretary Wilson to him and asked him about the trouble we were having with our building operations. Secretary Wilson gave him an outline of some of our controversies and discussions with the Park Commission and intimated that the Commission did not seem to know its own mind for any length of time. The President listed me with close attention, then in his characteristic way, he said - "I'll fix things!" He told the Secretary he would be down that afternoon and look at the excavations we were making for the buildings. The President said to expect him around about 4:30 and that he would walk over from the White House. It was a beautiful spring day and at 4:30 the Secretary and I walked out in front of the old brick building and strolled among the flower beds awaiting the coming of the President. Time passed and the President did not come. Over on the Ellipse back of the White House the high school cadets were having a sham battle. Guns were firing, drums were beating and there was much noise and yelling over in that part of town. Along about 5:30 P.M. the Secretary remarked that he suspected the President had got into the sham battle. Near 6 o'clock

we saw the President coming across the monument grounds, hat in hand and walking fast. When he got near enough we could see that his face and hands were grimy and his clothes covered with dirt and dust. He was in a happy mood and remarked that he had been having a bully time with the boys in the sham battle. He apologized for being late but said he could not miss all the fun going on and asked the Secretary to pardon him for the delay. Then quickly turning he said - "Where are the controversial holes in the ground, Mr. Secretary?" We lead him to the excavations and with a few simple diagrams explained the predicament we were in. The President listened and asked a lot of questions about our plans and some about the Park Commission. Then turning to the Secretary he said in substance, "Mr. Secretary, there are about a dozen fine old Senators who are after me all the time not to swerve an inch from the plans of our Park Commission and I know it would break their hearts if we swerved as much as these plans indicate." Then with a grin and a chuckle, he said - "Mr. Secretary, you would not want me to break the hearts of these Senators." The Secretary smilingly said he could not think of being a party to such a catastrophe. The President then said - "I think you had better revamp the excavations so as to conform with the suggestions and plans of the Commission." This was done as the present beautiful structure now testifies. It is true that 13th Street has disappeared along with the avenue of Ginkgos but gradually as new plans unfold it is evident when you look forward to the future as presenting something really beautiful.

It turned out that we had not heard the last of this forced change in our plans for the President was determined to read the

Park Commission a lesson and incidentally placate certain members of the House who had been berating the Commission for what was then considered its extravagant plans. So a little later the President called a conference at the White House. He confided his plans to Secretary of War Taft and left him to arrange the details. Briefly the plan was to call the Park Commission on the carpet, so to speak, having present certain members of the House of Representatives to witness the slaughter. The President also desired to have present witnesses who could show that the Commission had wabbled a number of times in connection with our buildings and this wabbling had cost the Government considerable money. Long afterwards Mr. Taft wrote a humorous story for "The Saturday Evening Post" about this meeting. There were present the entire 16 members of the House Committee on Agriculture. Mr. McKim who was to be the "goat" was present representing the Park Commission. Our three architects were on hand, also Captain Sewell, our technical advisor and engineer. The President called on the witnesses, Mr. Kim, Captain Sewell, our architects, and myself for any statements we desired to make. Mr. McKim briefly outlined the work of the Commission and how it had experienced difficulties as to just what to do about the location of our buildings. He said some of the problems involved had come upon the Commission before it had been given time to study the whole situation and necessarily mistakes had been made. Our architects were cautious and merely stated that they were working under the direction of Secretary Wilson as represented by our committee and Captain Sewell. Captain Sewell, however, was rather blunt and outspoken when it came his time to detail the difficulties he had

experienced in getting definite things from the Commission and the costly bills thereby resulting.

After we had all had our say the President addressed his remarks to Mr. McKim and gave the Commission a down-right scolding. He said, however, he wanted to support the Commission as he believed the plans made and being made were vital to the future development of Washington and its surroundings. It might be well to interpolate at this point that the Commission was largely a creature of the President. This was one of the reasons why so many members of the House were hostile. As the President warmed up to his task Mr. McKim fidgeted under the tongue lashing the Commission was receiving. The President finally closed with an admonition that he would expect in the future that the Commission would be careful of its decisions and actions and not cause any needless expense. I did not know for a long time after that Mr. McKim had been forwarned by Mr. Taft of the scolding he was going to get and that he must not take the scolding too seriously. The Congressmen were highly elated at the turn of affairs but seemingly overlooked the fact that the President would stand by his Commission in the big task he had assigned them. As the meeting broke up and we were going out Mr. Taft put his arm around Mr. McKim's shoulder and said - 'McKim you have won a great victory.' Mr. McKim replied - 'Yes, Mr. Secretary, and one more victory like that and I shall be a dead man. We had no further difficulties with the Commission although it was a matter of regret to us that we were required to put our buildings so far down in the ground. Time has shown that this was unnecessary as witnessed by later changes in the treatment of the central portion of the Mall and the grading plans.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE BUILDINGS - The Why of Two Wings

For more than 25 years the two marble buildings standing on the south side of the grounds of the Department of Agriculture and known as the East and West Wings were the subject of comment as to <u>why</u> they were constructed as two separate units when the law authorizing construction provided for <u>a building</u> for the Department of Agriculture. We have already referred to the construction of these two wings in another note but we did not fully explain how it came about that we put up two buildings with a space between for a central or main structure. The fact of the matter is that at the time we were making our plans for the buildings we were not a little embarrassed and to a certain extent harassed by a set of conditions for which we were in no way responsible.

The President and Congress were at loggerheads over numerous matters. The great trust busting game was on and Mr. Theodore Roosevelt was driving ahead using the big stick right and left. Commissions of many kinds were being appointed for many and sundry purposes. The commissions were a constant source of irritation to certain members of Congress who lost no opportunity to belittle their recommendations and block their activities. When we began to plan for our buildings we ran afoul of one of the commissions but of this we have spoken elsewhere.

As a starting point we got a plan for our housing needs through a competition conducted for us by the then Supervising Architect of the Treasury, a Mr. Taylor. Congress made an appropriation of $5,000 to secure the necessary plans, specifications, estimates, and costs of a structure that would meet our needs. A half a dozen or more architects entered the competition and the award was made by a jury of five architects selected by the Supervising Architect of the Treasury. In carrying out this work we drew up an outline of our general needs, but the architects did not follow this very closely. They evidently seemed more bent on providing a structure that would be beautiful and classic and which might meet the terms of the competition as drawn by the Supervising Architect. The firm of Lord and Hewlett located in New York City was the successful competitor and they submitted a really beautiful design but not at all adapted for laboratory purposes. We endeavored to bring the architects to our point of view as to the need for laboratory facilities and the kind of light and space generally required for this kind of service. In this effort we were not successful.

After several months of discussion and negotiation there developed in the minds of our building committee the germ of an idea for a series of buildings all eventually to be connected and forming one more or less harmonious whole. With this idea in mind and under Secretary Wilson's direction, I drew up a ground sketch showing a central administrative building with wings on each side and extensions in the rear

across B Street, S. W., covering the blocks from 12th to 14th Streets. We were convinced that the Department was destined for a great growth and development and that we would eventually need all the space indicated by our ground plan. Secretary Wilson gave his hearty approval and support to the plan and authorized us to take it up with the architects. As we did not have sufficient funds at the time for a central building and two wings it was decided that we would have general plans drawn for the central building and detailed plans for two wings. We submitted our ideas to the architects who had been successful in the competition and found that one of them, Mr. Hewlitt, was not only cold but actually hostile to our suggestions. Mr. Hewlitt seemed firmly convinced that we should erect one classical building and went so far as to say that if we did not have money sufficient to complete such a building we should at least start it with the funds we had and go back to Congress for more money to complete it. This proposal did not please Secretary Wilson at all. When I showed Mr. Hewlitt the squares and blocks representing our ground plan and their connections he rather sarcastically remarked that the sketches looked more like a "school of fish" than anything else.

Capt. John S. Sewell, of the Engineers Corps of the Army, had been assigned by the Secretary of War to aid us in our construction work. Captain Sewell suggested that inasmuch as he could handle the construction work that we ask the architects to draw plans for the central building and two wings and that we would pay them a 3 per cent commission for the work.

ACROSS A STREET." P. 4." COVERING THE BLOCKS FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

FOR A CLEAR STORY AND DEVELOPMENT AND THAT WE COULD ACCOMPLISH

THEM ALL THE SPACE INDICATED BY THE RIGHT PLAN. PROFESSOR

MILLION WAS HIS HEARTY APPROVAL AND ENDORSEMENT OF THE PLAN THE

ENGINEERS. WE SAKE IT ON WITH THE ENGINEERS. WE WE DID

NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT FUNDS AT THE TIME FOR A COMPLETE BUILDING

AND TWO WINGS IT WAS DECIDED THAT WE WOULD HAVE ROOMLET BEING

THE FOR THE CENTRAL BUILDING WHICH DESIGNED BY THE ENGINEERS.

ENGINEERS IN THE COMPOSITION WAS FOUND THAT ONE OF THEM, MR.

HEMILIT, WAS NOT ONLY GOOD BUT ACTUALLY POSSIBLE TO ONE UNDER-

STANDING. WE ENTIRELY CONVINCED THAT WE WOULD HAVE

SECTIONS. MR. HEMILIT SEEMED LITTLE DISCOURAGED THAT WE WOULD

HAVE TO WAIT BUT WE A GREAT BUILDING WAS ALREADY ON THE WORK.

In this way we would save 2 per cent commission on construction which would amount to about $30,000. Captain Sewell took the ground that the architects would not have to spend any time in supervising the construction and could be called in from time to time if needed and paid for such time. When these matters were submitted to the architects they declined to have anything to do with the proposition and insisted that we revert to the original plan of their building. The Secretary then authorized us to dismiss the architects which was done. The Secretary further authorized us to endeavor to secure the services of other architects with the result that we finally engaged the firm of Rankin, Kellogg and Crane, of Philadelphia, to undertake the preparation of plans practically as outlined by us. Rankin, Kellogg and Crane prepared tentative plans for the central building and completed plans for the two wings. The beautiful structure as it now stands is a monument to their ideals and vision as architects.

As already stated our funds were not sufficient for a central building and two wings so the Secretary authorized that two wings be put up first to take care of our laboratory workers. None of us expected that it would be nearly 30 years before a central building could be provided. For nearly two decades after authorizing our structures Congress seemed to lose interest in buildings for Government use in the District of Columbia. It was lavish in its appropriation for renting buildings and when such matters were brought before committees and suggestions made that buildings be erected Congress usually

In this way we would save 2 per cent commission on construction which would amount to about $20,000. Captain Sewell took the ground that the architects would not have to spend any time in supervising the construction and could be called in from time to time if needed and paid for such time. When these matters were submitted to the architects they declined to have anything to do with the proposition and insisted that we revert to the original plan of their building. The Secretary then authorized us to dismiss the architects which was done. The Secretary further authorized us to endeavor to secure the services of other architects with the result that we finally engaged the firm of Rankin, Kellogg and Crane, of Philadelphia, to undertake the preparation of plans practically as outlined by us. Rankin, Kellogg and Crane prepared tentative plans for the central building and completed plans for the two wings. The beautiful structure as it now stands is a monument to their ideals and vision as architects.

As already stated our funds were not sufficient for a central building and two wings so the Secretary authorized that two wings be put up first to take care of our laboratory workers. None of us expected that it would be nearly 20 years before a central building could be provided. For nearly two decades after authorizing our structures Congress seemed to lose interest in buildings for Government use in the District of Columbia. It was lavish in its appropriation for renting buildings and when such matters were brought before committees and suggestions made that buildings be erected Congress usually

took the ground that it was cheaper to rent buildings than to construct and own them.

No one, so far as I am aware, ever officially questioned the erection of two separate wings. In fact, when explanations were given Congressmen and others as to the why of the matter, this action of the Secretary was approved. As an aftermath of the discharge of Lord and Hewlitt this firm tried in several ways to block our work. First an appeal was made to the President through an attorney, ex-Secretary of the Navy Tracy, on the grounds that the writer of these notes, acting as chairman of the building committee, had sought by collusion with the firm of Rankin, Kellogg and Crane to have the firm of Lord and Hewlitt dismissed. The President promptly rejected Mr. Tracy's appeal. Lord and Hewlitt then took the matter into the courts and were defeated before two tribunals. It is gratifying to have witnessed the day when our "school of fish" plan materialized into one of the outstanding developments of Washington's great building program.

took the ground that it was cheaper to rent buildings than to construct and own them.

No one, so far as I am aware, ever officially questioned the erection of two separate wings. In fact, when explanations were given Congressmen and others as to the why of the matter, this action of the Secretary was approved. As an aftermath of the discharge of Lord and Hewitt this firm tried in several ways to block our work. First an appeal was made to the President through an attorney, ex-Secretary of the Mary Tracy, on the grounds that the writer of these notes, acting as chairman of the building committee, had sought by collusion with the firm of Rankin, Kellogg and Crane to have the firm of Lord and Hewitt dismissed. The President promptly rejected Mr. Tracy's appeal. Lord and Hewitt then took the matter into the courts and were defeated before two tribunals. It is gratifying to have witnessed the day when our "school of fish" plan materialized into one of the outstanding developments of Washington's great building program.