

From the Merion Civic Association Tenth Year Book of 1923

THE MERION WAR TRIBUTE HOUSE

WALTER T. KARCHER AND LIVINGSTON SMITH, ARCHITECTS.

The accompanying sketch was made when Mr. Johnson's gift was accepted by the public meeting in Merion.

The building, which will be completed this year, will probably be the most sumptuous and extensive of any Community buildings erected to date. It occupies a little more than the ground covered by the former Johnson residence.

The old driveway is preserved, and from this there will be two main entrances to the building, one under a porte cochere and the other from the broad terrace across the Southern front. Entering by the porte cochere one is led by a half flight of stone steps to the main floor. On one side of these steps is the office and on the other the women's cloak room. Below the women's cloak room is the men's cloak room, and near this the men's smoking room.

Entering by the terrace entrance one is brought directly into the memorial hall, occupying all the interior of the tower. Thus the two entrances converge to this memorial hall, which forms the pivot of the whole building. This hall will have stone floor and walls, and stone groining and ceiling, and will be lighted from the large leaded window seen on the outside of the tower. Here will be placed the monumental setting in stone for the bronze tablet and the effect will be inspiring. Into this tower, as stated, will lead the two entrances from porte cochere and terrace, and from it will lead the entrances to the auditorium and to the lounge, which in turn will lead to the American Legion room.

The American Legion room will have other entrances from the exterior, so that it can be closed off from the remainder of the building and be a complete entity of its own.

The auditorium will be 38 feet wide by 55 feet long. At the opposite end from the entrances will be the platform, connecting with three dressing rooms below. Under the platform will be storage space for chairs. Above the entrances from the memorial hall will be the movie booth. Ample exits and entrances will be provided. The space has also been designed to accommodate in the future the best organ that could be placed here, although the organ is not a part of this gift.

As a necessary adjunct to an auditorium of this sort, a service pantry with outside entrance has been designed to lie between the auditorium and the lounge, so that it may function either with the lounge for small affairs or with the auditorium for larger affairs. This pantry will also connect by stairway with the basement.

Special attention has been given to the design of the floor in the auditorium in order that Merion will have the finest dance floor on the Main Line.

The lounge will have rough plaster walls and wooden ceiling. It will be lighted by windows on opposite sides of the room and have a generous stone fireplace.

The American Legion room will have stone floor, rough plaster walls, and an open-roof construction, carried on adzed wooden trusses. This room will also have a large alcoved fireplace.



In every part of the building only the most solid and permanent construction will be used, with special attention given to keeping the maintenance cost at the extreme minimum. For example, there will be no wood on the exterior except the doors and their frames; the windows are all metal and have metal frames, and even the wood usually found around the eaves and gables has been entirely eliminated, so that there will be no depreciation. The rafters will be steel in all cases except where the open-roof construction occurs over the Legion room.

An interesting thing about this building is that all the stone is hewn on the ground. This is very unusual, as ordinarily all cut stone comes to a building ready to set. In this case the architects wished to avoid the harsh contrasts and sharp lines of "cut stone" (which is usually limestone), and instead, are having the stone for mullions, jambs and other molded portions cut by hand from the same stone as is used in the walls. As a result all the stone for these parts comes from the quarry in huge boulders and is dressed on the spot. This method has not been used to this extent for probably 400 years, and gives a degree of craftsmanship that is striking and one which is almost never seen in this country.

**WALTER T. KARCHER,
LIVINGSTON SMITH.**

From the Merion Civic Association Eleventh Year Book of 1924

THE MERION WAR TRIBUTE HOUSE

WALTER T. KARCHER AND LIVINGSTON SMITH, ARCHITECTS.

The Merion War Tribute House is completed and will be occupied this Spring. The history of the project is no doubt well known to all in Merion—how the idea originated with the Merion Civic Association of creating a Community House as a War Memorial to the Merion men who entered the military service in the World War; how this idea was developed and a fund started in Merion; how Mr. and Mrs. Eldridge R. Johnson donated their Merion estate for the project, and then later how Mr. Johnson offered in addition to erect the building at his own expense, and to add to the fund already raised by the Civic Association an amount sufficient to insure the permanent maintenance of the building.

The beginning or constructing period of the story is now at an end and the idea is now in permanent form. The unfolding of the story—the use to which the idea will be put—is about to start, so has no part in this note. We will confine ourselves to the sentiment and symbolism attempted to be caught and held in the fabric. Also, as last year's Year Book of the Civic Association went into the disposition and grouping of the building, it will only be lightly touched on here.

The physical use of the building is Community Service, but the idea that was the cause of the building is the glorification of personal service to our country in its emergency.

While a certain amount of symbolism is used in the carving on the exterior of the tower, it is particularly stressed in its interior. Here the Memorial Hall occupies the whole of the tower and is so placed in relation to the rest of the building that it will tell its story to anyone on entering or departing from the building proper.

The stone walls and groining of the hall strike a solemn, almost religious note, which is accentuated by the mellow glow of the glazing. Set into the masonry walls in the honor space, is the shrine, containing a Tennessee marble tablet, bearing the four gold star names and the names of the other men who were in the Service; above this the dedicatory inscription,—

“This building is erected in honor of the men of Merion who served our country in the World War.”

Carved into the stone framing of the tablet is a replica of the obverse of the victory medal given by the Government to each man on leaving the Service.

A single great mullioned and transomed window illuminates this stone vaulted hall. In the leading of this window are the symbols of branches of service of the Army. Halfway up the walls of the Hall is a frieze of stone shields alternating with bronze names. These names are significant. They are the official names of the battle clasps of the victory medal which designate all the major engagements in which American troops participated. The names of the battle clasps of the Navy are contained in the symbolic carving on the stone balcony in this hall.

The significance of the Navy and the Marine Corps is expressed in the carved wood panels over the doors to the Auditorium, and again in carved and painted medallions over the entrance from the porte cochere.

The Shields in the frieze of the Memorial Hall have a different significance. These, together with the shields in the passage from the porte cochere, and the leaded glass in the windows of the Legion Room, bear the familiar division shoulder insignia of the Army. The insignia shown in this building are the emblems of all the divisions that were in action in the War,

Above all the symbolism in the Memorial Hall and dominating it is a massive carving in wood of the great American eagle with wings spread, clutching the National Shield.

No symbolism is attempted in the Lounge, but in the Legion Room, the home of the Merion Post, it is indicated in the leaded windows already referred to, in the large model of the American Legion button let into the rough plaster wall, and in the fireplace hearth, where the service star is worked in the brick mosaic. This service star appears also on each of the larger rain conductor heads on the exterior of the building.

Again, no symbolism is carried into the Auditorium, where the varied nature of the uses of the room would at times make it seem out of place. Here, however, the practical uses of the room have been studied so that the requirements of every sort of meeting can be met. The pantry, with its outside service and service stairway connecting with each floor of the building, opens into one end of this room, as well as into the lounge, and can take care of any type of refreshments.

The fireproof projection booth at the rear of the Auditorium has connections for both stereopticon and projection machines at the same time, and is in buzzer connection to and from the platform.

Although the platform is designed primarily as a speaking and concert platform, it can easily be adjusted to small plays. It opens on spaces at either side and connects with three dressing rooms and toilets "below stage." These dressing rooms and the stage have their own outside entrances. Foot lights and top lights are provided, as well as plugs for spot lighting.

On the walls and ceiling throughout this room at various places are supplied strong, almost invisible, hooks, to which wires may be strung for decorations or miniature electric lighting, and plugs are supplied to feed almost any type of decorative lighting.

In the centre of the apron of the stage there has been provided an opening connecting with the basement. Through this can be passed the Auditorium chairs when it is desired to quickly transform the Auditorium to a dance floor.

Special attention has been given to the floor in this room. It is specially designed to have a springiness and is practically independent of the solid concrete slab that carries it. The Auditorium will seat about 400, and amply take care of about 250 for dancing.

The crowning feature of Mr. Johnson's gift is the splendid organ which in every respect is the best, and contains the most complete parts that it is possible to supply for this room. It is operated by the regular manual, and also can be operated automatically. Its range of stops and operation will cover any type of musical use.

One of the most ingenious portions of the construction of the building is the method of bringing the organ music into the Auditorium. The entire apparatus, with the exception of the manuals, is located in the basement under the Auditorium. Here, surrounded and divided by solid masonry walls, are the air intake, the blower room, the relay room, and the main organ and solo organ chambers. From the last two chambers great ducts are carried up to the apron of the stage,

and the organ speaks from the grill covered apertures facing the audience. The whole operation is controlled from the manuals.

The gift, which, with the grounds, represents over half a million dollars, includes everything except the furnishing. This is a comparatively small matter, as all the Auditorium chairs are part of the donation. The gift also makes possible the maintenance, so that the continuation of the story of the project after this setting has been established will be in the hands and activities of the dwellers of Merion.