UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND MEDICAL BUILDING

HISTORY AND CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEDICAL BUILDING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND IN BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

BY

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SUMMARY

The history of the Medical Building, starting with the plans, discussions, and dreams of the founders and working up to the erection of the Medical Building at Lombard and Greene Streets in 1812 was largely obtained from the very thorough historical writings of Eugene F. Cordell.

The material for the writing of the construction of the building was obtained by observation and interviews with persons familiar with the building. No plans or records were available due to the age of the structure.

no interior plans or sketches or measurements given in thesis

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HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

MEDICAL BUILDING

The establishment of the University of Maryland may be regarded as the final and crowning event of a long series of discussions, plans and attempts, all looking towards organization of the profession and the securing of opportunities of advanced medical instruction for this community.

The first indication of a tendency towards a community of interest and action in the profession was an interesting discussion in the newspapers, upon the subject of medical reform and suppression of quackery, which began in 1785 and was carried on for several years. A society was formed by the physicians of the town for the purpose of discussing the most eligible plan for the carrying on of this movement, but further progress was ended by the death of the leader, Dr. Charles Frederick Wisenthal.

In the fall of 1789 a more complete organization of the physicians of the town was effected by the formation of the "Medical Society of Baltimore" under the leadership of Dr. Andrew Wisenthal, a son of the above, and Dr. George Buchanan. Under auspices of the society dissection was attempted and the body of an executed criminal was procured for the instruction of students of anatomy and surgery. The people of the town, however, interfered and took possession of the body, which greatly dampered the spirit of the teachers. Wisenthal continued to conduct classes until his death in 1798.

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The College of Medicine of Maryland, the present School of Medicine of the University, owes its foundation to Dr. John Beale Davidge who settled for practice in Baltimore in 1796. He early entertained the idea of founding here a school of medicine and was only deterred by the lack of cooperation of other physicians. In 1802 he started classes in Anatomy, Surgery, Midwifery, and Physiology. These classes were held twice a week and were continued until 1807 when the "Medical College Bill" was passed by the legislature.

James Cocke and John Shaw associated themselves with Davidge's project in 1807. They conducted classes in a small building erected on ground belonging to Davidge, on Liberty Street, just south of Saratoga. They secured a subject as had their predecessors and met with a similar fate when it became known. This mishap resulted in a great loss for Davidge and interupted the classes for a time, but it had the effect of bringing the profession to the support of the enterprise.

Sometime early in 1808 a building was secured standing on the southwest corner of Fayette (then called Chatham) Street and McClellan's Alley, which had formerly been used as a school house, but had been tenantless for several years. It was consequently in a dilapidated condition, but was repaired as far as possible and served the purposes of the College until the completion of the building on the corner of Lombard and Greene Streets in 1813. The want of a suitable building for the purposes of the College had been painfully felt from the first, and the ways and means for securing it

Title

had been frequently and anxiously discussed. There being no available structure in the city, it was necessary to build one and the only way in which this could be done was by the help of a lottery. Lotteries were the favorite resort in almost every enterprise of the day, coming to the aid of both public and private enterprises. These lotteries abounded in the legislative enactments of the state for a half century and supplied a large revenue towards a means of carrying on the government.

The first act authorizing the drawing of a lottery for the benefit of the College was passed by the legislature on January 20, 1808. The amount derived from the lottery was not to exceed $40,000. Other Acts relating to the University lottery were passed during the sessions of 1811, 1813, 1816, 1820, 1826, and 1827. The amount derived reached as much as $140,000. Nothing was derived from the lottery until after the college became a University, and the expenses were meanwhile borne by the members of the Faculty, who made themselves personally responsible for the debts incurred. Loans from banks and individuals were effected and help and encouragement was given by a number of public-spirited citizens, especially John Eager Howard, Robert Oliver, and Robert Gilmor.

The purchase of the lot on the northeast corner of Lombard and Greene Streets, from Colonel Howard for the nominal sum of $10,000 is one instance of the liberality of that citizen.

The plan for the erection of a building on this lot was entrusted to R. Cary Long, an eminent architect, to whom Baltimore

is indebted for many of her handsome and enduring structures. In accordance with his plans, an imposing structure was erected, modeled upon classical lines, which, still after a century and a quarter, attracts the attention of all beholders, and seems destined to endure for centuries.

The Roman Pantheon—Concrete Dome nearly 2,000 years old—Rome, Italy

CONSTRUCTION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

MEDICAL BUILDING

The plan for the erection of the Maryland Medical Building on the lot at Lombard and Greene Streets was entrusted to R. Cary Long, a noted architect, who gave to Baltimore many of her outstanding buildings. In following out his plans, an imposing structure modeled upon classical lines, was erected, and its massive proportions seem destined to endure for centuries.

The style of architecture is that which was so common in those days, and is seen in many of Baltimore's buildings: The Cathedral, The Universalist Church, the McKim School, the old Masonic Temple, etc. Long selected the Pantheon at Rome for his model, and therefore it may well have excited the pride and admiration of Faculty and citizens, for it was at the time of its erection, without doubt, the finest structure devoted to medical education to be found in the New World.

The Pantheon is a celebrated temple at Rome, built in 27 B.C. by Marcus Agrippa. It is a large edifice of brick built in circular form with a portico of lofty columns. It has the finest dome in the world; 142½ feet internal diameter, 143 feet internal height; and its portico is almost equally celebrated. It is now a church and is known as Santa Maria Rotonda. Raffael and other famous men are buried within its walls.

The following description of the Medical Building was given in the fall of 1815: "The splendid edifice which constitutes the

Medical College, as the center from which the other departments are to diverge, stands on Lombard Street extended in the western end of the city. It is constructed on the plan of the Pantheon at Rome. The front faces on the Washington Road, commanding an extensive prospect down the Patapsco and Chesapeake. The grandeur of the building's exterior does not excell the internal convenience of the apartments. The Anatomical theatre, with its necessary appendages, is as extensive and appropriate as those of any of the European Schools. The lecturing room alone is capable of containing twelve hundred persons with convenience. The chemical hall, immediately below, is but little inferior; it will accomodate about a thousand, a part of its area being taken off by the laboratory and necessary apparatus. The apparatus is complete, accommodated to the taste and views of the learned professor." This article was taken from the "Viator", Niles Weekly Register, September 15, 1815.

The writer of this article has apparently erred in his judgement of the seating capacity of the lecture rooms mentioned above. The floor space has not been altered since the original building was erected and now only accommodates three hundred students.

The builders, Towson and Mosher, started operations in 1811 and the corner stone was laid in May 1812 by Colonel John Eager Howard.

It is a large brick building, the circular form of which has an external diameter of sixty-five feet and walls of eighteen

inches thickness throughout. The portico extends twenty-five feet to the front and is ornamented by eight massive thirty inch columns. The columns appear to have been bricked up and stuccoed and they are remarkably well preserved.

There are offices on each side of the rectangular portico which also contains a stairway to the upper floor of the circular portion. The second floor of the portico is suitable for little other than store space due to the very irregular low roof above.

A six foot passageway encircles the entire circular portion on each floor and contains entrances into the tiered classrooms within and offers exit by a wooden circular stairway, six feet in diameter, in the northeast corner of the building, which evidently served as a fire escape. The stairway is now in very poor condition and is little used.

The lower lecture room is entered on two levels, on the ground floor level by four tunnels under the tiers of seats and on a higher level at the top of the tiers. The seating space faces the south side of the building and rises from floor level to about twelve feet. In the south wall are built smelting furnaces which were a part of the modern equipment of which the original Faculty was so proud and are now obsolete but are preserved because of their historical interest.

The upper lecture room is also entered on two levels, the second floor level by two tunnels and the top of the tiers by four entrances. The seating space extends around the entire wall. The

dome above is of brick and lets in light through eight skylights four feet in diameter, placed at forty-five degree intervals and are ten feet in from the outer wall. At the top of the dome is a large skylight, twenty feet in diameter which is divided into fifteen degree sectors. The skylights form an excellent method of lighting which is much superior to the light supplied by the windows in the lower lecture room.

The Medical Building was one of the first to use gas illumination, which was introduced into Baltimore by R. Cary Long a pioneer in gas illumination. The building is now modernly equiped with electricity.

Defective wiring during the installation of the electric system caused a fire about ten years ago. The fire spread under the wooden braced tiers of the lower lecture hall and greatly weakened them. Apparently no effort has been made to repair the damage but the seating space above is still in use. The building as it stands, with its wooden constructed interior, is very subsceptible to fire.

The construction of the building allows very poor utilization of space and it is no longer suitable to be used for laboratory or research work, but now furnishes only lecture space.

Dr. T.O. Heatwole, Secretary of the Baltimore Schools of the University of Maryland plans to renovate the building and utilize the space to a better purpose. Devoted to the purpose that he plans and with the historic background which it now possesses

the Medical Building will become one of the outstanding points of interest in the state of Maryland.