

THE WILKES-BARRE
ART MUSEUM

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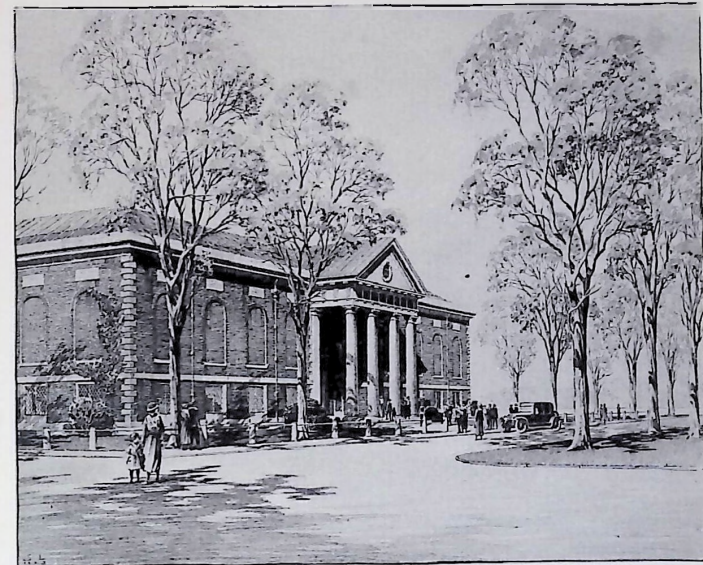
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WITH a strong sense of the important relation of a public museum to the life of a progressive community, the Wyoming Valley Society of Arts and Sciences was organized by some of the citizens of Wilkes-Barre on November 13th, 1922.

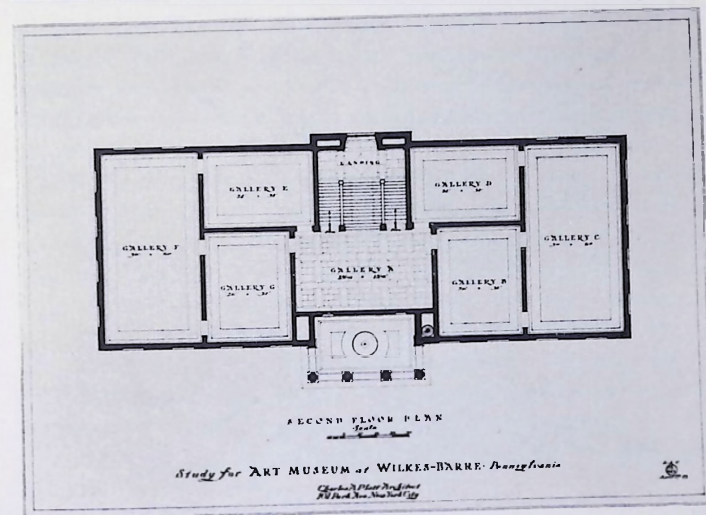
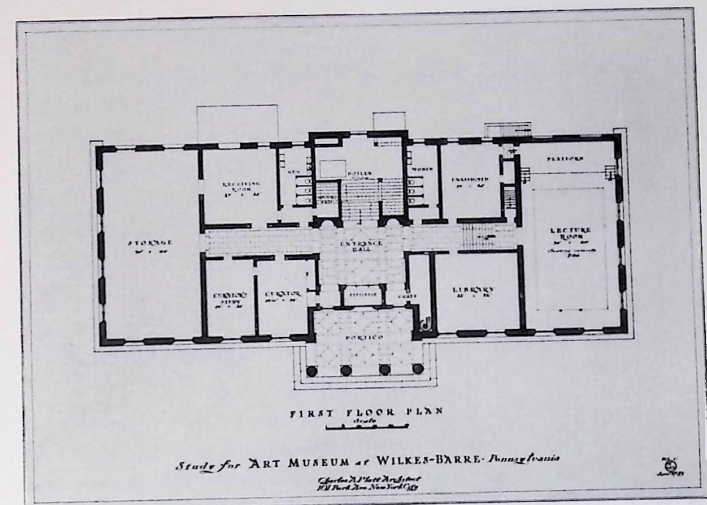
The purpose of this Society is expressed in a definite plan. It desires to establish and maintain a building which shall contain galleries for the preservation and exhibition of paintings, sculptures and other works of art, space for the development of an appropriate library, a room for the giving of lectures, proper administration offices, and, in short, all of those museum facilities which may be used in the

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advancement of public education and taste. The Society thus grounds its appeal for sympathy and support upon a constructive idea and in order to present this in tangible form it has procured drawings for a suitable building from Mr. Charles A. Platt, the architect of the Freer Gallery of Art at Washington. Prints of the façade and floor plans are included in this brochure.

The drawings indicate a fireproof structure of brick and limestone in a style following that architectural tradition which prevailed when Wilkes-Barre was founded in 1770. Classical simplicity and dignity mark the main elevation, which will face West South Street, the only conspicuous ornament being a stately pillared porch in the center. The Georgian lines of the Colonial period have been adopted as beautiful in themselves, fitting to a monumental edifice, in harmony with our historical associations, and, through their delicacy and grace, free from academic coldness. Within the building a similar standard is maintained. The interior is intended to be friendly and welcoming rather than imposing. At the same time the serious function and atmosphere of a museum are duly considered.

The walls of the entrance hall are to be of limestone, the pavement there, in the corridor and on the staircase, of Knoxville marble. The use of these materials, chosen partly for their durability and cleanliness, has been determined also by the belief that an edifice of this nature should be unostentatious but handsome. Flanking the staircase which rises from the entrance hall there are two niches in which statuary may be placed. Other opportunities are provided for such decorative expedients as may suggest themselves, but in accordance with the most modern conception of museum design this building has been planned with the closest attention to symmetry, economy of space, and practical convenience. Immediately at the left of the vestibule the Curator's rooms are placed, and from them in turn there is direct ac-



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cess to the storage and receiving rooms. The routine business of the institution is in this way kept concentrated. To the right lies a room assigned to the accumulation of such special books as are allied to the subjects represented in the museum. On the same side of the building as this art library the lecture hall is placed, both being brought within the easiest possible reach of the visitor. Retiring rooms, etc., are unobtrusively but adequately supplied. The whole purpose of this first floor is to secure in a well balanced arrangement the maximum of usable space with plenty of light and air, and ease of circulation for visitors and officials.

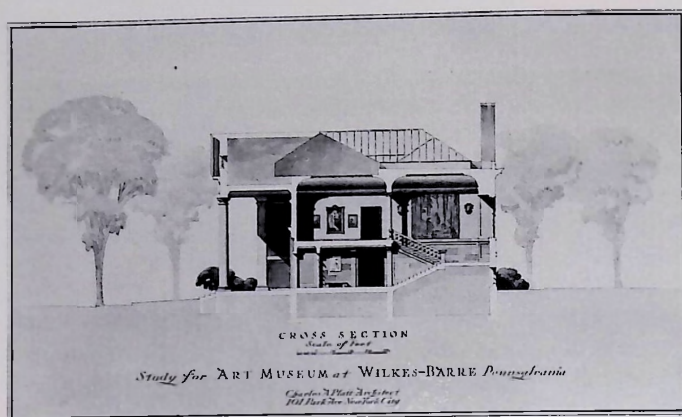
The exhibition resources of the building begin on the staircase, where the upper walls afford space for the hanging of tapestries or large decorative paintings. Seven galleries are contemplated, the largest sixty feet long, the smallest something over half that size. Gallery A, in the centre, at the top of the staircase, is in the nature of a great hall and is destined for the reception of sculpture and hangings. Cases for prints may also be stationed on the floor at this point. The larger room on the left, Gallery F, is for the permanent collection. Gallery C, on the right, resembling it in position and dimensions, is for such special exhibitions as may from time to time be organized. Temporary shows of water colors or prints would be assigned to one or more of the four smaller rooms. The latter, in fact, could be drawn upon for varying purposes as circumstances dictated. Observation of the plan will show that the doorways throughout are so arranged that any gallery or galleries, apart from the great hall, may be held active or inactive at any time, as conditions demand, without disturbance to the ensemble. Galleries C, D, E and F may be closed while the other two are in use. Galleries F and C may be closed while the other four are open to the public. In a word, the building is framed to be adjustable exactly to the needs of the moment.

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The restrained scale of the museum (susceptible to extension in the future, at the back, should occasion arise) is a matter having an interest of its own. The remark is sometimes heard that a great museum is a rather bleak, unsympathetic place, hardly calculated, in the nature of things, for everyday human enjoyment. In so far as there is any truth in this complaint it is due to the enormous scale on which the leading museums of the world are built. They hold vast corridors and rooms, which dwarf the exhibits in them and overwhelm the beholder. Reduce the scale and you bring warmth into the building, warmth and a sense of intimacy. Witness, in illustration, such a museum as the little Poldi-Pezzoli in Milan or some of the smaller provincial museums in England or France. It is this more restricted, more intimate and thereby more charming and delightful ideal which it is proposed to realize in the Wilkes-Barre museum. The various rooms, in their proportions, coloration and lighting, have been conceived as rooms for the real enjoyment of works of art, not as chill cabinets of "specimens" but as galleries to enframe activities forming part and parcel of the life of the city. It will not be enough if Wilkes-Barre is proud of its museum. It is indispensable that it should like it.

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The museum idea is one on which it is here apposite and interesting to pause. It is very old. Some of the earlier facts in its history point to nothing more nor less than the impulse of mere curiosity. When the traveller in Italy enters the church of San Ambrogio at Milan he is shown on one of the columns in the nave "the brazen serpent which was raised by Moses in the wilderness!" He does not, perhaps, immediately realize it, but when he is looking at that serpent he is looking at a manifestation of the museum idea. The man of antiquity and, like him, the man of the Middle Ages, rejoiced to gaze his fill upon oddity.



It is a curious circumstance that the ecclesiastical authorities of old played upon this idle disposition in order to lure men to their religious duties. Murray, in his voluminous work, quotes from the learned Durandus this fantastic mediaeval note: "In some churches two eggs of ostriches and other things of like kind which cause admiration and which are rarely seen are accustomed to be suspended, that by their means the people may be drawn to church and have their minds the more affected." In the seventeenth century, among the "Chiefest Rarities in the Publick Theatre and Anatomie-Hall of the University of Leyden" there were such items as a drinking cup made of the skull of a Moor, the hand of "a Meermaide", and "a thunderbolt given by Melchior de Moncheson". Verily, the spirit of Barnum was abroad long before he pitched his first tent. The truth is that the museum mood is fundamental and goes back to the dawn of civilization. From ostrich eggs man turned to coins and medals, from thunderbolts to masterpieces of painting.

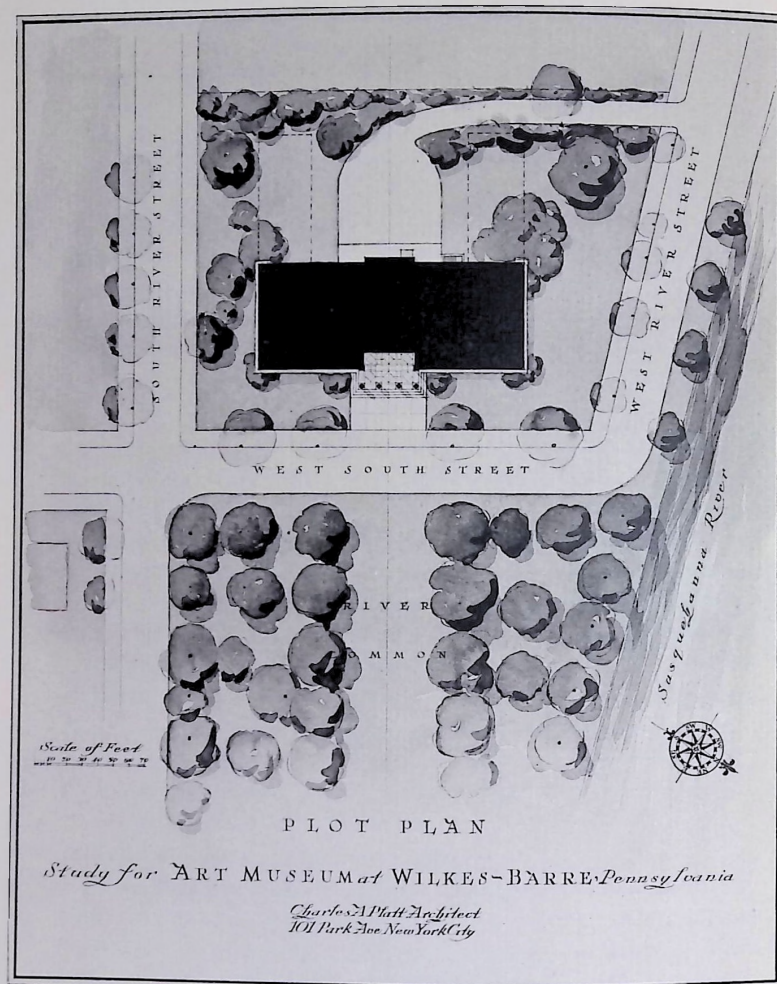
One striking change is especially to be noted. For centuries the art museum was a distinctly private and aristocratic affair. In the

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Renaissance it meant simply the collections of princes and of such rich merchants as the Florentine Medicis. It was essentially an appanage of kings. The history of the Louvre in Paris is typical. That house of immeasurable treasure had its origin in the taste and splendor of the French monarchy. Its priceless paintings and sculptures were the personal possessions of royalty and as far removed from the public as though they were in the moon. But the revolution changed all that and in 1793 the Louvre was opened to the world as a museum. In different ways the story of the Louvre is the story of all the great galleries of Europe. Royal collectors established in their palaces the works of art that every one now enjoys. The community has been the beneficiary of the individual.

In a measure this aspect of the matter persists to this day. Our own captains of industry are the Medicis of their time. They accumulate masterpieces and when they die (or sometimes before) they give them to a museum. The Metropolitan is unthinkable without the magnificent donations of Marquand, Hearn, Morgan, Altman, Dreicer and others. A similar reflection is evoked by museums all over the country. Here arises one of the happiest phenomena in the annals of our subject, the growing participation of American citizenship at large in the fostering of our museums. If the United States has now an extraordinary number of flourishing art museums, really going concerns, the beautiful homes of things of beauty, it is not simply because so many millionaires have put their hands in their pockets but because the people everywhere have risen to the duty involved.

I will cite but a single illustration of the manner in which the democratization of museums, begun in Europe, has been carried on in the United States. In 1897 the Société des Amis du Louvre was founded. It came into being to assist the museum in purchases which were desirable but which official resources could not compass. Mem-



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bers paid an annual subscription of twenty francs or gave more if they wished and some of them have proved amazingly liberal. At present there are between three and four thousand members of this society and through their aid the Louvre has been enriched by some of the noblest things within its walls. The idea is being rapidly adopted in the United States. The Friends of American Art, incorporated in Chicago in 1910, pays \$1,000 in five annual instalments of \$200 each. There are fifty members of the group and they have made substantial additions to the collections of the Art Institute. In 1916 a body of One Hundred Friends of Pittsburgh Art was formed in the smoky city. The membership pays annual dues of \$10 and specializes in the work of local painters. The Friends of American Art, organized in 1919 in Indianapolis, presents out of its funds works to the Art Association of that city. The Baltimore Friends of Art, dating from 1920, with a membership of 350, not only purchases pictures but gets up exhibitions and lectures and does all it can to "stimulate interest in art". In Lincoln, Nebraska, the Friends of Fine Art, organized only two years ago, takes in both adults and children, taxing the latter only ten cents a year. It has already a membership of 8,000 and gives to the public schools the paintings it buys.

In the foregoing paragraph I have only scratched the surface, as it were, of an impressive subject, the rallying of the individual layman to that standard of artistic education which is upheld more particularly by the art museum. I have cited these "Friends" as especially representative of what is really a widespread movement. They give one a vivid sense of the personal interest, the personal energy and affirmation, without which the cause would languish. The broader category of subscribers to annual membership in this or that museum embraces hundreds of thousands and spells great contributions to the support of our museums.

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Is there not a lesson in it for Wilkes-Barre? Does it not enforce a maxim in citizenship which no community can afford to ignore? The interests of art are no longer solely in the hands of rulers, states, civic governments and a few rich connoisseurs. They belong to every man and woman. And most significantly do they thus belong to dwellers in a city where the conditions of a Paris, a London, a New York do not exist, but where a smaller population more directly demands individual action. Wilkes-Barre has need of an art museum. Its creation depends upon the wisdom and the energy of the people of Wilkes-Barre. Shall they not respond where one city after another in the United States has enthusiastically responded?

CHEL TENHAM, N. Y.