The Illinois Chemist

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The Illinois Chemist is glad to have been afforded this opportunity of welcoming as our guests the members of the American Chemical Society. We feel that we have been indeed fortunate in that our University has been selected as your meeting place. To us your presence here marks the beginning of a new era for Chemistry at Illinois. The opening up of the new building with its mammoth floor space and modern and practical equipment are but the outward signs of a progressive development and expansion which is evidenced in every unit of our organization. To feel that we undergraduates are actually a part of this organization, brings us to a realization of our responsibilities, to the many things that are expected of us. One of these, and by no means the least important, is that we contribute our share toward making this spring meeting a success. Let us show every one of our visitors that he is welcomed here by every one of the undergraduate body.
When Dr. Arthur N. Palmer returned from Germany to take charge of the Department in September, 1896, the period of growth had begun. The number of students increased rapidly in the next three years, and with the small staff, there, in 1897-98, there were disadvantages in having to go to the main library (then on the second floor of the southwest wing of University Hall) for all chemical books. Students of the early ‘90’s recall as a familiar sight Dr. Palmer fairly sprinting from one building to the other.

But under the rule then, the University library was only open during the day, and books could not be taken to other buildings.

However, after considerable discussion, a plan was devised; permission was given by the Department to put up some wooden shelves along the west (inner) wall of the balance room (now No. 304 and 306 of the Law Building). Dr. Palmer and Professor Pray drew out on their personal checks the books most needed, and the Chemistry Library came into being. The exact date of opening has not been learned, but W. E. Tower, ’98, took a picture of it which appears with this article and the negative is dated as taken November, 1892. A cross-country run was no longer necessary to find a melting point or verify a page reference.

The number of books increased with the demands of the department, and the adoption of a more liberal policy for the main library.
A notable addition to the library was made by Rev. Palmer, who gave Dr. Palmer’s chemical library to the Department. A special bookplate and name help make this a suitable memorial to Dr. Palmer, for to him largely we owe the existence of the Chemistry Library.

On January 1st, 1916, the Chemistry Library contained 6000 volumes, about 500 of these being serials. More than one hundred current serials are taken. About 2500 volumes will be added by transfer from the main library when the new room is ready. New books and journals are being purchased as funds permit.

Purchases, other gifts and the growth of serial sets made it necessary to annex the former home of the Chemical Club, Room 235; all shelf space is now full and at rush hours the appropriate sign for both rooms is “Not even standing room.”

Relief is in sight, however, in the new spacious Room 277, whose dimensions are 38 by 45 feet. With stools in the west half and tables by the nine wide east windows that are too small to give a view of many than tree tops, with a new catalog case, telephone, electric fan and improved lighting, we shall have almost absolute protection from fire and water. Hereafter visitors will be shown the Chemistry Library—but hurried past it to view crowded laboratories and elaborate apparatus.

The cramped and noisy of 235 will be replaced by aablestastic quiet, plenty of room, and, we believe, by increased usefulness.

The first building of the University, rear view

The Department of Chemistry began its existence in the basement of the rear wing of this building. From a photo taken about 1875.