

# *The* ENGINEERS' CLUB of DAYTON

SCHENCK & WILLIAMS  
ARCHITECTS

*By Howard Dwight Smith*

THE story of the Engineers' Club of Dayton is a story of men, of ideas and of accomplishments before it is a story of architecture. Architecture is at its best when it forms a proper and adequate background for human activities and when it reflects these activities effectively. In this club are combined so many features of a certain interesting form of human activities that we are attracted by the story of its organization as well as by the architecture which houses it.

The City of Dayton has come to have the reputation of being a city of pioneers in civic, social and religious work as well as in industry. To catalogue the pioneers in its industrial operations would be to list a large proportion of the men who are behind the enterprises of this "City of a Thousand Factories." Foremost in such a list would appear the familiar names of such men as John H. Patterson, to whom the world owes the development of the cash register, and E. A. Deeds, for a long time Mr. Patterson's business associate, but later and more recently interested in airplane development. Such a list would also contain the names of scientific inventors like the Wright brothers, who have made Dayton the cradle of American aviation, and of Charles F. Kettering, the moving spirit of Delco. These names are mentioned by way of introduction simply to show that there has existed in Dayton a sort of atmosphere of creative endeavor and of scientific research to which a very large proportion of the community's reputation may be attributed. In the commission form of city government, with a civil engineer as its city manager, Dayton was a pioneer.

That form of city government is no longer an experiment, but is recognized as a distinct step forward in political economics. Also the realization of extensive flood prevention plans at Dayton marks the first practical solution of stream control as applied to an entire watershed.

It is natural that such a community should be a fertile field for the inception of an organization of high ideals in engineering association, and that men of ideas and of action should want to meet in other spheres than those of business alone, and to enjoy each others company, to exchange thoughts and to discuss ideas of current or common interest. The embodiment of this spirit in a tangible form is the Engineers' Club at Dayton. When the new home of the club was opened, in February, 1918, the program of the day's exercises contained this foreword:

"The Engineers' Club of Dayton is dedicated to:

"The dissemination of truth,

"The promotion of useful education and civic righteousness,

"The fostering of good fellowship among Miami Valley engineers,

"The professional advancement of its members,

"The inspiration and encouragement of the younger men,

"The making of a technical city where creative endeavor finds reward."

The organization of the club goes back to the beginning of 1914, but its rapid growth led to two things. First, it was "recognized that a meeting place, permitting the fearless and thorough discussion of engineering problems, coupled with the fostering of good fellowship

and the inspiration and encouragement of the younger men, is quite worth while, and will confer lasting benefits upon the entire Miami Valley." And second it was natural that men in the engineering profession from other communities, from far and wide, should be attracted to such an organization to exchange opinions and to share experiences. The Engineers' Club felt that it would be quite fitting to provide a place which could be considered the professional headquarters for all such transient talent.

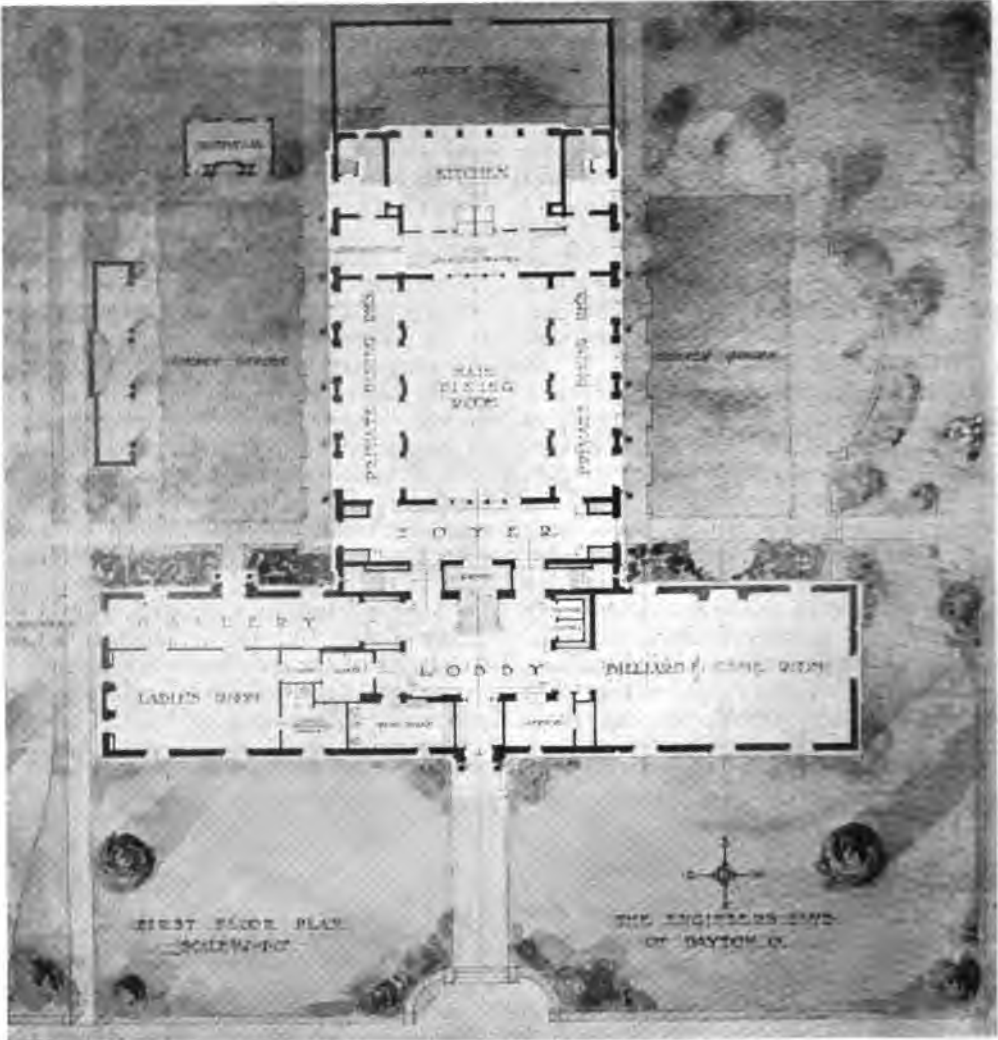
With a generous desire to accommodate these two ideas, and as real pioneers in the movement, two prominent, public-spirited engineers, closely identified with the organization, as well as with the industrial activities which have been previously mentioned, made it possible to erect the new club house which became the home of the organization early in 1918. It is this feature, perhaps, which makes the Engineers' Club unique, for it is hardly to be supposed that such an organization should, in the short

space of three years, be in a position to finance a large building project from a treasury recruited from ordinary sources.

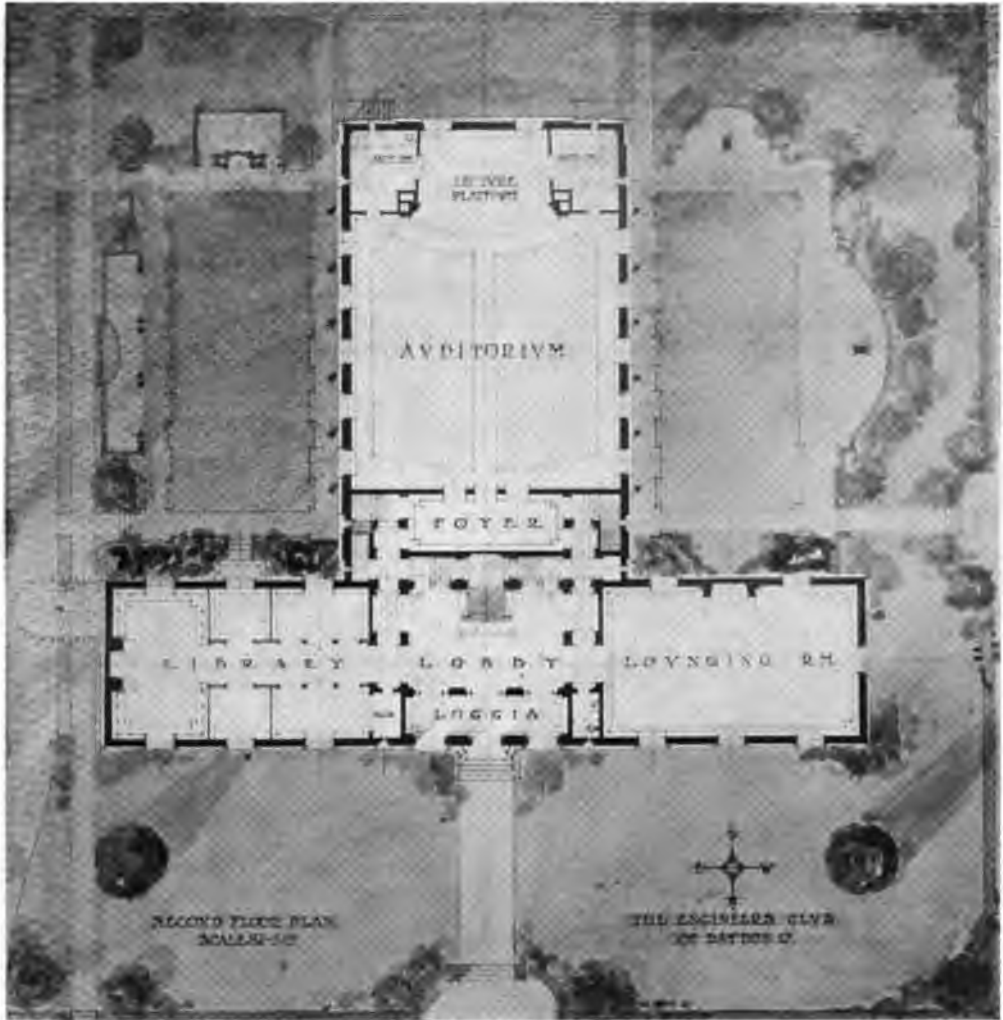
All of this is of interest to architects and to the profession of architecture for the reason that in the broadmindedness of its constitution this club recognizes the close relationship which exists between architects and engineers. This recognition extends to the point of embracing architecture and architects within the influence of the six ideals to which the club has been dedicated, as mentioned above. Architects, their assistants and their draftsmen are assumed to be included in the category of men whose activities are correlated. The local organization of the American Institute of Architects is not absorbed nor even merged in the club, and membership in the architects' organization is in no way related to membership in the larger club. But by arrangement, the courtesies of the club house are extended to the local organization of architects for meetings, conventions and the like, as



PERSPECTIVE VIEW—ENGINEERS' CLUB OF DAYTON.  
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FIRST FLOOR PLAN—ENGINEERS' CLUB OF DAYTON. SCHENCK & WILLIAMS, ARCHITECTS.



SECOND FLOOR PLAN—ENGINEERS' CLUB OF DAYTON. SCHENCK & WILLIAMS, ARCHITECTS.



READING ROOM ON THE SECOND FLOOR—THE PHOTOGRAPH OVER THE MANTEL IS THAT OF WILBUR WRIGHT—ENGINEERS' CLUB OF DAYTON.

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general period between Gothic and Classic in England known as Tudor. That period was a vigorous one of transition and produced many fine examples of domestic architecture which have inspired a great many of our efforts in America.

There need be no dispute with the architects for dressing up the interior in Tudor style while the exterior of the building speaks of a later time. More are they to be commended if, by the use of soft dark stained wainscots and panelings, rough plaster walls, geometric pattern and beam ceilings, they are able to create a feeling of inviting "home-ness" and attractiveness. And it may be said, too, that engineers are quite as susceptible as the rest of the public to the call of the current fad for "Old English" ideas and forms and atmosphere. Where the designers have adhered most closely to their precedent

have they been most successful. The plaster ceilings in geometric patterns excel their attempts at heavy plaster beaming.

Conveniently disposed about the lobby are the simple club accessories, a coat room, a men's room, an office and telephone booths. To the west, or right from the entrance, is the billiard and game room, accommodating four tables and serving conveniently as an auxiliary lounge and smoking room. It is a low room and no attempt has been made to give it an appearance of height. From the opposite end and from the corner of the lobby opens the "long gallery," a convenient name, around which there are associated certain historic sentiments. What Tudor manor house did not have its long gallery with long views and vistas, and tapestries and unending successions of patterned ceilings? While this long gallery in the Engineers' Club

serves as a means of circulation connecting the carriage entrance with the lobby, still, as in the old houses, it is of generous width, and when provided with chairs and seats it serves also as a waiting space, for conversation or informal conference. It is usually referred to at the club itself as the "visitors' gallery."

Off from this long gallery opens the ladies' room, appropriately secluded from the general activities of the club. Strange as it may seem, this room, dressed up in an entirely different style from all the rest of the interior, is the gem of the building. Departing from Tudor and Elizabethan, the architects have expressed themselves in the refined and genteel style of the Adam Brothers, a style of low relief and classic forms, with an applied or painted finish. This room has been executed with commendable consistency and the rectangular leadings of the large French casements are quite in keeping here. Not dissimilar in general character is the dining room foyer; more severe, however, than the ladies' room and treated with hard plaster wall surfaces with few lines and little decoration, much after the fashion of the severe entrance halls of the eighteenth century London houses of which we have spoken before. This dining room foyer is on a level with the dining room itself, five steps below the general level of the first floor, which permits of added ceiling height in the dining room and in the auditorium above.

The main portion of the dining room is approximately twenty-eight feet wide by forty-five feet long, and is flanked by side aisles of small private dining rooms in such a way that the whole can be thrown together more or less easily for the occasional accommodation of large parties. For everyday use this arrangement in plan is quite satisfactory, for one may take one's choice as the mood inspires to mingle with one's fellows or to sit secluded and unhindered or unchallenged by friends. The usual club convenience of having accommodations for private parties by members should not be overlooked in passing.

In the second floor of the building the

disposition of units is almost identical with that of the first. The main lobby has its counterpart in another of the same dimensions and the dining room foyer of the floor below becomes the auditorium foyer above. The game room is echoed by the lounge, a room of the same area but of greater ceiling height. In the east wing the library group of rooms is superimposed over the ladies' room and the visitors' gallery.

The upper lobby, like the dining room foyer, is executed in stonelike plaster, or "Caen stone," which has judiciously been left unscored by false stone joints. Perhaps no other material has been subjected to more use in imitation of another material than the so-called "Caen stone" or hard plasters. Hard plaster or stonelike walls have their definite place in interior design, particularly appropriate in vestibules, halls, corridors and the like, but their use in good design need not be disguised by the addition of false jointings or otherwise. Happily this has not been done in the Engineers' Club.

The second floor lobby opens on to the loggia, which overlooks the park and the Miami River at a point almost opposite one of the centers of flood prevention activities, the confluence of the Mad River with the Miami.

Axial with the unobstructed portion of the lobby are the library and the lounge. The term library is applied to a group of rooms housing the nucleus of a technical collection. The principal room of this group is the reading room, comfortably furnished and embellished by a large mantelpiece. The four other rooms of the group are like alcoves whose walls are lined with book shelves. These alcoves can suitably be used for intensive study or may be appropriated for private conferences without interfering with the usual and normal functions of other club rooms.

The lounge at the opposite end of the lobby occupies the area of the entire west wing, measuring some thirty by fifty feet. Here is a large room, quite informally furnished, with the dominating idea of making it all that the name implies, a room for lounging, for a mo-



LOUNGE—ENGINEERS' CLUB OF DAYTON.  
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mentary slackening of the energies. In the great space embraced by the wainscoted walls and the oak beamed ceiling and in the presence of the almost overpowering mantel, one seeking rest may lose oneself in a secluded cushioned corner, or muse before the fireplace, or find diversion in music.

As a club house the features described above have been, and are now, affording quite ample and satisfactory service in every respect, and it is to these parts of the building that the members look for their daily accommodation and enjoyment. But the feature of the building which does most toward the "dissemination of truth," the inspiration of its members and the extension of its influence along educational lines is its auditorium. Its platform is the center of an open forum from which discussions have been led, lectures delivered, experiments performed and demonstrations

made, dealing with a great variety of subjects and problems of the engineering and industrial world. Of its general properties as an auditorium all that need be said is that its seating capacity is about four hundred and fifty on a floor area of approximately fifty-five feet square. It is provided with a permanent fireproof projection booth concealed within the rear wall, and the exacting and punctillious fire code of the Ohio State Board of Health is amply complied with by the four minor fireproof stairways, one at each corner of the room.

The acoustics in the auditorium are good, as is usually the case in square low rooms with ceilings which are somewhat broken up by beams, but the special feature of the room, in keeping with the other appointments of the building, is the provision on the stage of all the facilities necessary for any sort of experi-

ment or demonstration. There are water and gas connections, steam, and compressed air and electricity for any form of light or power.

The completeness of the special equipment on the stage to a certain extent is a measure of the equipment throughout the building. With so many technical interests represented on the roll of membership, it is only natural to find that all sorts of forms and devices are included in the construction of the building. The steam heating plant and a ventilating system represents the last word among heating engineers, with valves, regulators and devices applied here and there which do almost everything connected with the system except deliver coal to the bunkers, and open and close the windows. Those members whose business slogan is "do it electrically" have seen to it that the electric equipment has not been slighted. Of the lighting fixtures it must be said to their credit that they are not conspicuous, but fit in effectively with the general scheme of things.

The housing of a club of the reputation and influence of the Dayton Engi-

neers in a building which is architecturally appropriate, is a credit to the club and to the architects. The sphere of its influence measures quite well with that of a club as large and as well established, as, for instance, the Engineers' Club of New York, whose commodious quarters are in West Fortieth Street. The Dayton Club is an inspiration to communities smaller than the metropolis, but equal to it in enthusiasm and possibilities.

The appreciation evinced by the rank and file of the club for the "energy, thoughtfulness and generosity" of their esteemed leaders, Colonel Deeds and Mr. Kettering, in making possible the erection and equipment of the building has been recorded on a bronze tablet which has been placed in a frame on the second floor lobby beside the stair well railing. This tablet expresses the sentiment that the building was erected as an expression of interest in scientific research and devotion to the cause of truth, "that through it not only this but future generations shall be uplifted and moved to greater endeavors." Good architecture is a fitting background for such sentiments as these.

