

Fac. Lib. Bldg. Comm

Bennington College
September 20, 1957

To: Faculty Library Committee

From: William C. Fels

As several of you have pointed out, our choice of a site for the library is hampered by the lack of a plan for campus development. I have thought and have even talked to one or two of the Trustees about putting on the brakes and stopping to devise a plan, but they feel, and I agree, that things have moved too far to permit a wait long enough to accomplish thorough planning, and that a library placed somewhere close to the present administrative complex would necessarily result from any plan. As all the suggested sites are within 100 yards of each other, any one site should satisfy any new conditions reasonably well.

Placing the library somewhere between the main campus and Jennings to help tie the two parts of the campus together is an appealing thought. It has been expressed by several persons. However, it presents practical problems. As you inch the site toward Jennings you begin to isolate it, to make student access more difficult, and to complicate the road problem.

The "Meadow" site beyond Cricket Hill might be used in such a way as to provide a visual and therefore a psychological connection between the two parts of the campus. I suspect this could be accomplished more easily and to better effect by shifting the parking lot which is now outside my office, converting the space into a lawn and cutting some trees so that the Barn and Jennings face each other.

In the long run it will probably be better to plan to bring the Jennings and Carriage Barn activities closer to the main campus than to try to reach out for them by building between them or looking at them across the meadows.

The observation has been made that we have plenty of land and do not need to cramp ourselves. This is true. Yet there is an advantage in keeping the buildings within easy walking distance of each other. We could easily become, even more than we are now, an automobile campus rather than a walking campus. This would, I think, accentuate one of the few objectionable features of present campus life.

If you agree that placing the library somewhere close to the Barn, Commons and Student Houses is a reasonable conclusion, the real question for the Faculty Committee is whether it thinks that any of the sites under consideration is so unsatisfactory that the Committee wants to rule it out. I would not recommend, and I am quite certain the Trustees would not approve, any site the Faculty definitely opposed.

This reasonable attitude on the part of the Trustees suggests, I think, as a matter of courtesy that unless you definitely wish to rule out a site you leave them the opportunity to weigh the professional advice of the architects and their own opinions as well as yours.

It is my own opinion, with which you are of course perfectly free to differ, that any of the three most-often-mentioned sites, the "Parking Lot" site, Cricket Hill, and the Meadow beyond it, would be acceptable. All have advantages and disadvantages.

The Parking Lot site has the advantage of greatest ease of access for the largest number of people, the neatest tie-in to the existing plan, and aesthetic appeal to the architects, who, in this matter, are the professionals. It has the disadvantage of proximity to the Student Houses. I have walked down to the site several times on different evenings and have not found the noise or traffic objectionable. I could not, myself, rule it out as an unreasonable choice.

Cricket Hill has the advantage of being farther from the Houses yet reasonably accessible. It does not fit in quite as well with the present plan, yet the fit is not bad. It is a difficult site on which to achieve a proper distribution of activities on the two floors. There is a service access problem. The solution is likely to require either a flight of steps to the main floor, or considerable excavation and an unpleasant lower floor, largely buried and close to the roof of the Nursery School. Yet I don't feel I could rule it out.

The Meadow site has not been surveyed, but it appears to present the same difficulties as the Cricket Hill site, somewhat aggravated. Its back would be to the main entrance road. Its "advantage" is its greater isolation and possibly its relation to Jennings. If I were to rule out any site, I'd be tempted to rule out this one.

I wrote this memorandum with the thought that it might be helpful to you, and to discharge my obligation to let my views be known, not to influence you. I know you will feel free to arrive at whatever conclusion your experience and familiarity with the life of the College, which I lack, will lead you to.