endowment, by numerous gifts from Associates and other friends of the Library, and by outside grant funding. The valued support of individual donors enables the Library to contribute its part to the world of learning and is of the utmost importance for the ongoing vitality of the institution.

The
John Carter Brown Library Building

Original drawing by David Macaulay © 1975
THE CASPERSEN BUILDING

In 1990, a 15,000 square foot, four-story, T-shaped extension, designed by Hartman-Cox Architects of Washington, D.C., was added to the east side of the original cruciform building. Construction management of the project was by the Dimeo Company. For this addition, named the Caspersten building, the architects continued the essential classical features of the original building, including the use of ornamented Indiana limestone. At the same time, they introduced numerous subtle variations intended to set off the new wing from the original building and to accommodate and express the new functions and needs that have arisen at the Library since its founding.

A framed panel on the south exterior of the Caspersten building has carved into the limestone the words, “Speak to the past and it shall teach thee.” This injunction is clearly a variation of chapter 12, verse 8, in the book of Job, “Speak to the earth and it shall teach thee,” but it is not known who first chose the phrase as the Library’s motto. The motto was used initially on the bronze tablet dedicated to the memory of John Nicholas Brown, which was installed in the vestibule of the original building in 1913. Designed by Tiffany & Co., the tablet reads: “In memory of John Nicholas Brown of the Class of 1885 who gave this Library with its building and endowment to commemorate the name and work of his father, John Carter Brown of the Class of 1816 from whom he inherited with the Library Love of Knowledge, Devotion to Historical Research and Appreciation of Beautiful Things. Speak to the Past and It Shall Teach Thee.”

The John Carter Brown Library is an independently funded and administered center for advanced research in history and the humanities, located at Brown University since 1901. The accomplishment of the Library’s essential mission—the encouragement of scholarly research concerning early America from 1492 to approximately 1825 and the collecting of the rare books and manuscripts that must underlie that scholarship—is made possible by the proceeds from the Library’s
by Franz van Maelseck about 1650. The tapestry on the north side illustrates Joseph’s brothers showing the bloodstained coat of many colors to their father (Genesis 37:31–36). This was woven by Jan van Aerts, also at Brussels about 1650. In front of this tapestry is a bronze bust of John Nicholas Brown (1900–1979) sculpted by Joseph Coletti in 1927. The Reading Room, lit by fixtures designed by E. F. Caldwell, is lined with bronze bookcases, stained to resemble mahogany. The floors are covered with Turkish carpets. Carved mahogany tables provide workspace for scholars using the Library’s materials, and the carved standing cases display rare books, maps, and prints on exhibition.

THE BROMSEN – BOLÍVAR ROOM AND THE HAROLD BROWN ROOM

To the right as one enters the building is the Maury A. Bromsen – Simón Bolivar Room, which opened in March 2000 as a completely rebuilt exhibition space. On permanent display in the room is a collection of manuscripts and iconography, donated by Mr. Bromsen, relating to the famed El Libertador and to the revolutions for independence in South America.

To the left of the entrance is the Harold Brown Room, lined with mahogany bookcases that echo the design of the bronze cases in the Reading Room. In this room are the artifacts that connect the institution of today with its origins in the mid-nineteenth century as a private gentleman’s library: the cloth-covered table at the center of the room is that on which John Carter Brown examined book purchases at his Benefit Street residence; his favorite chair is here, and the others surrounding the table are from the Brown home as well. On the wall is a portrait of John Russell Bartlett (1805–1886), librarian of the collection in the early years, and teacher and friend to John Nicholas Brown (d. 1900) and his brother Harold (d. 1900). This oil was painted by John Knowlton Arnold in 1871.

Although the building is monumental in design, the architects were able to capture the serenity of a private family residence by careful attention to interior color and furnishing.
The John Carter Brown Library opened its doors on the Brown University campus in 1904. The original cruciform, Beaux Arts building, designed by the Boston firm of Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge, and built by the Norcross Brothers Company, utilizes eclectic details derived from several cultural traditions. The walls and cornices are Indiana limestone, with granite along the base. The high portions of the roof are red clay tile. The portico is Ionic. Richly carved anthemia break the line between roof and cornice. The design of the cresting along the edge of the roof is reminiscent both of the classical scallop pattern and of the feather headdress of Brazilian Indians, which captured the European imagination and eventually grew to symbolize the exoticism of the native peoples of the Americas.

THE MACMILLAN READING ROOM

The vestibule is panelled with Italian marble and opens directly into the main room of the building, the W. Duncan MacMillan Reading Room, which occupies about half of the floor space of the original building and the full height of the structure. Four pillars of Indiana limestone support the roof, framing the doorway entering the room and the fireplace that faces it. On the stone mantelpiece rests a bust of John Carter Brown (1797–1874), executed in marble by Franklin Simmons in 1874. Above hangs a portrait of John Nicholas Brown (1861–1900), son of John Carter Brown and donor of the Library. The oil was painted from life in Paris by Léon Joseph Florentin Bonnat in 1887.

On the left of the fireplace hangs the oil painting A View of Providence by Robert Wade. Its companion piece A View of Hong Kong, also by Wade, hangs on the right. Both paintings, executed in the 1920s, along with items like the bronze inkstand, candlesticks, and bell from India displayed elsewhere, testify to the Brown family’s early involvement in trading ventures to the East.

Two tapestries, both about twelve by fourteen feet, adorn the walls at either end of the building. The tapestry on the south side depicts the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39:7–23) and was woven at Brussels