

**The Headquarters of the  
Theosophical Society in America**



**Olcott in Wheaton**



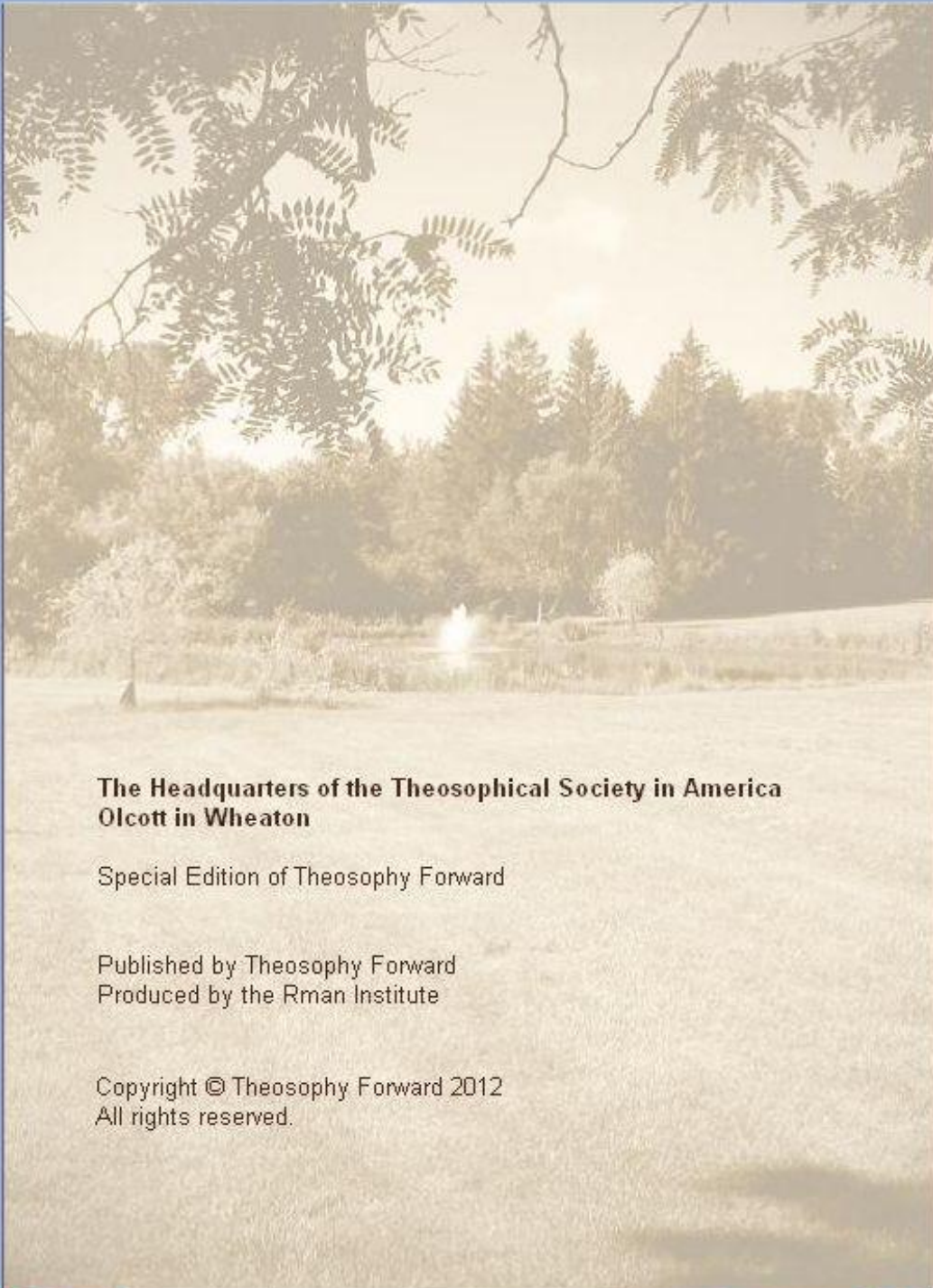
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**The Headquarters of the Theosophical Society in America  
Olcott in Wheaton**

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**The Headquarters of the  
Theosophical Society in America**

**Olcott in Wheaton**



The booklet was compiled and published  
in close cooperation with Janet Kerschner,  
Archivist, Theosophical Society in America,  
Olcott in Wheaton

 **Theosophy Forward**



## About

Janet Kerschner, Archivist



Janet Kerschner has been working in the Archives of the Theosophical Society in America since January, 2006, and previously had volunteered in the Olcott Library. Back in 1993, she worked with Tony Lysy on the TSA preparations for the Parliament of the World's Religions. She has Master's degrees in Management and in Library Science, and is a member of the Academy of Certified Archivists. Her husband and two grown sons are also members of the Society.

## About

The Archives Department

The Archives Department is responsible for the organizational records of the TSA and other groups, and also for special collections from individual Theosophists such as Boris de Zirkoff, Fritz and Dora Kunz, and Helen Zahara. Janet works with papers, photographs, audiovisual materials, computer files, art, and artifacts. One of her newest projects is the establishment of the TS Wiki, a collaborative encyclopedia about Theosophy and the Theosophical movement worldwide.



*Helena Petrovna Blavatsky*



*Henry Steel Olcott*



*William Quan Judge*

Portraits of the Founders in the corridor on the ground floor of Olcott.

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Gallery of photos of former National Presidents



Alexander Fullerton, 1895 – 1907



Weller Van Hook, 1907 – 1912



A. P. Warrington, 1912 – 1920



L. W. Rogers, 1920 – 1931

## Foreword

by Tim Boyd, National President



The Olcott national center of the Theosophical Society in America has been a resource for the theosophical world and the local Wheaton Illinois community since its cornerstone was laid in 1926. Its growth and development as a center of Theosophy has mirrored the progression of the American section which it serves.

I have the good fortune to not only work, but live at Olcott. For almost forty years I had regularly been coming and going from my home in Chicago, seeing it in every season, in sunshine, snow, and storm. It is a beautiful place marked by groves of trees, open prairie space, water, and stately buildings. It is sometimes hard to imagine that when the property was purchased it was a corn field without a building, a bush, or a tree. Everything that we see and treasure today has sprung from the generosity, vision, and hard work of those generations of





*Sidney Cook, 1931 – 1945*



*James Perkins, 1945 – 1960*



*Henry Smith, 1960 – 1965*



*Joy Mills, 1965 – 1974*

theosophists who came before us. Some of those members are well known and have impacted the TSA in profound ways. For most of them, their names have been forgotten. The remaining witness to their contributions are the mature, but silent trees they planted, the bricks and mortar they purchased, the pathways, library, furniture, and traditions they established. All of these loving signs of commitment to a great movement carry their message across the years.

Not a day goes by that someone who has no knowledge of the TSA's mission or philosophy, comes to simply sit or walk on our grounds. Whether it is the sheer beauty of the place, or something deeper that they sense, they feel uplifted in this atmosphere. For theosophists the sensing goes deeper. For almost ninety years this has been a place where an experiment in brotherhood has been attempted, where harmlessness and service have been guiding principles for the community, and where the teachings enunciated by the society's founders have been studied and shared. The accumulated energies of so many have made Olcott a potent center of spiritual influence.

It is an honor to present this brief offering on the history of this special place. There are few people who could claim the extensive knowledge of history and detail that Janet Kerschner has brought to this project. As TSA archivist, for years she has been immersed in extracting meaning from literally thousands of diverse historical documents and objects. Special thanks go to Anton Rozman for his sensitive design work that has made this project come to life and to Jan Kind for conceiving of this e-book and bringing the contributors together.





*Ann Wylie, 1974 – 1975*



*Dora Kunz, 1975 – 1987*



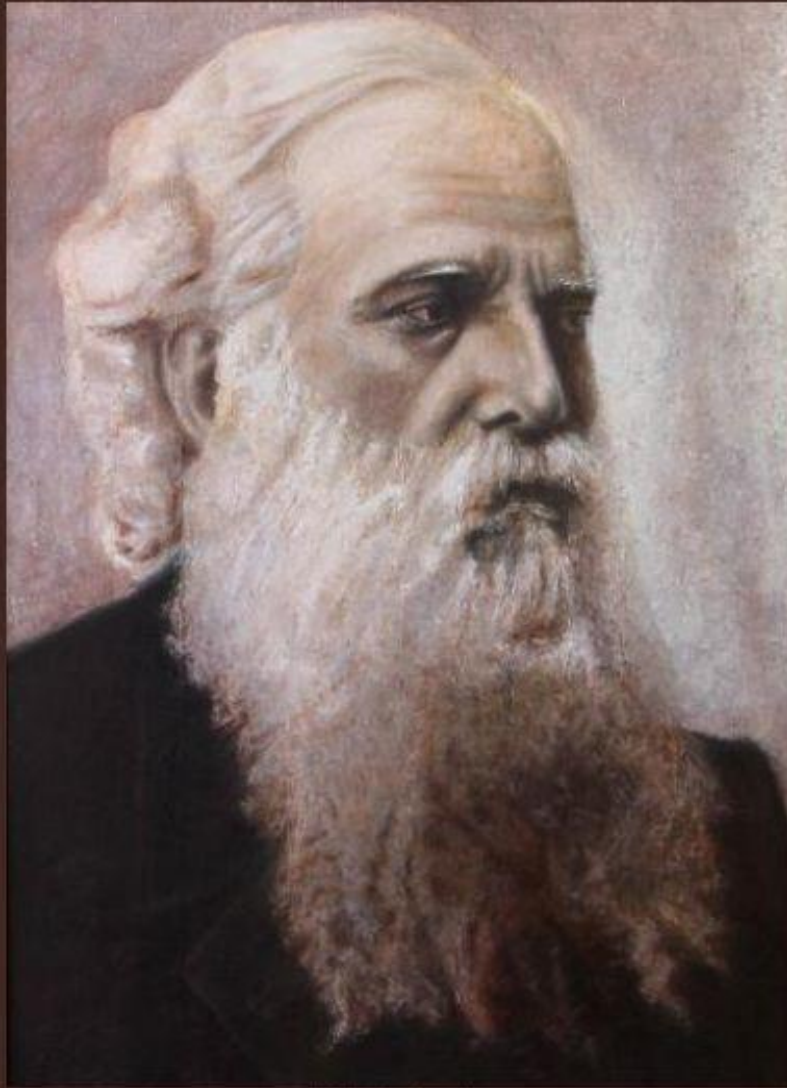
*Betty Bland, 2002 – 2010*



*Dorothy Abbenhouse, 1987 – 1993*



*John Algeo, 1993 – 2002*



*H. S. Olcott*

## Introduction

Olcott is a place of great activity as the headquarters campus of the Theosophical Society in America. Named after Henry Steel Olcott, the co-founder and first president of the international Theosophical Society, the estate is located in the Midwestern town of Wheaton, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. Olcott comprises a little over forty serene acres (about 16 hectares) that are open to the public from dawn to dusk every day. It is a center for administration and education, and a sanctuary for recreation and reflection.





L. W. Rogers

## How the American Theosophical Society came to be in Wheaton

In 1925, President L. W. Rogers and the Board of the American Theosophical Society decided to establish a permanent national headquarters estate. Previously, the locations of headquarters were determined by the preferences of the elected Presidents (General Secretaries). The American Theosophical Society had formed following the 1895 split among American Theosophists, with Alexander Fullerton leading members who remained loyal to Adyar. His successor, Dr. Weller Van Hook, moved central operations from New York to Chicago in 1907, and five years later the next President, A. P. Warrington, took headquarters west to establish the Krotona colony in old Hollywood. In 1920, the new President, L. W. Rogers, decided to make a fresh start in Illinois. He was familiar with Chicago from an early episode of his life when he was involved in the famous Pullman Strike. (As editor of *The Railway Times*, Rogers was arrested in 1894 with socialist Eugene V. Debs and other union leaders in a case, defended by Clarence Darrow, that was contested to the United States Supreme Court.)

Under Rogers' influence membership had increased - largely in response to his dynamic nationwide lecture tours. In 1920 alone, he organized 55 new lodges. The growing staff was very overcrowded in a house at 826 Oakdale in Chicago, with desks

in the halls. One staff member said there was "hardly enough room to lay down a lead pencil!"



*Site on March 26, 1925 - view to North-West*

Mr. Rogers led an extensive search for a new site, considering many possible places within a 500-mile radius of Chicago. Mayors and governors wrote to the Society to advocate for their communities as potential locations for the new headquarters. Staff member - later, National Secretary - Mrs. H. Kay Campbell discovered a farm newly subdivided near the western suburb of Wheaton. The land had many attractions for the Society. Theosophy had a strong presence in the vibrant city of Chicago, which was easily accessible from Wheaton by the interurban electric rail service running 87 trains per day. The Union Pacific Railroad through Wheaton ran directly to several cities along the West coast, and additional rail service was available in Chicago. Mail and express services in Wheaton could provide excellent

support to the Society's large correspondence, with mail available six times daily. At the same time, the staff was attracted by quiet, beauty and charm of the country. They envisioned a serene center for research and retreat. The Society purchased nearly 10 acres (about 4 hectares) of land early in 1925 for \$11,000.



*Union Pacific*





*Water garden, August 25, 1925*

## Planting a grove

The new estate had been farmed for several decades. It was a tabula rasa - a blank slate of cultivated earth on which the Society could build its home. Trees were the first priority, and staff members began planting a grove on May 6, 1925. The first tree planted was a silver linden donated by Kay Campbell.



*Tree planting, May 6, 1925*

Each tree bore a bronze plaque recognizing the donor.



*Tree planting 1925 - bronze plate*

Construction of a water garden began the same week, using the flow of a natural stream, and a cottage for the caretaker was completed on June 15. Members nationwide followed the rapid progress in the *Theosophical Messenger*, where the President appealed for donations of money to construct a headquarters building. Mr. Rogers personally purchased lots adjoining the property, and built a cottage. He and other members eventually donated their land to the Society, so the campus grew steadily.

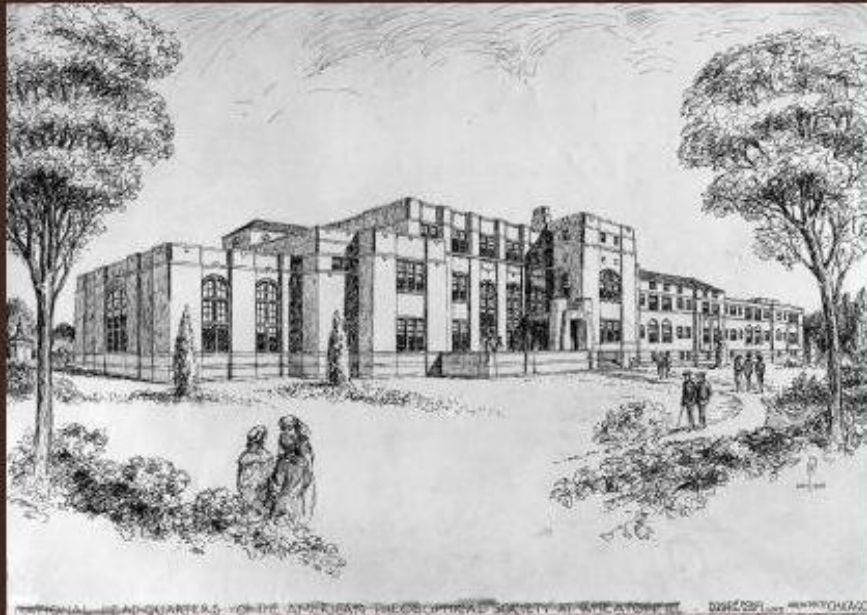
[View additional photos - "Planting a grove"](#)



*Grove and cottage, August 8, 1926, view to West*



## Construction of the Headquarters building



*Architect drawing of the Headquarters from South-East*

When sufficient funds had been pledged to make construction feasible, Mr. Rogers asked Theosophist and architect Claude Bragdon if he would be willing to design the new building. Bragdon had closed his architectural practice and was engaged in theatrical design in New York City, innovating in the coordination of music and light shows. He was unwilling to take on a major architectural design project, but recommended his friend Irving Kane Pond of Chicago, who was former president of the American Institute of Architects and highly respected among his peers. Pond's firm submitted two designs to the American Theosophical Society for consideration, and the Board deadlocked in trying to decide between them. Rogers sent the drawings to Claude Bragdon, eliciting an opinion. Bragdon sent back a telegram that he preferred the asymmetrical design, and that decided the matter.

Financing of the building was accomplished by donations and by selling bonds to members and lodges, in amounts as low as \$10. No mortgage was ever required, and the last bonds were retired in the 1940s. Members supported the construction effort in many ways, by sending tea sets and linens to furnish the building, and flowering plants to enhance the campus.

Excavation began in the summer of 1926, and on August 29 the cornerstone was laid by Annie Besant and A. P. Warrington in a Co-Masonic ceremony. Large crowds assembled for the event, which was heavily covered by Chicago newspapers. Jiddu Krishnamurti was present.



*Cornerstone laid by A. Besant and A. P. Warrington*

Construction was hampered by wet weather, but by June 20, 1927 the exterior had been completed. Moving into the building was a large undertaking. The Society was then operating four printing presses, plus linotype, folding, cutting, stitching, binding, and addressing machines. Some paper files were destroyed in a train wreck while being transported, and most membership

records had to be reconstructed. Nonetheless, George S. Arundale and Srimati Devi came on August 28 to dedicate the building, and the staff moved into their rooms on September 17. Seed was sown to establish the huge expanse of lawn in front of the structure, and the Society had a new home.



*L. W. Rogers at desk 1927*

[View additional photos - "Construction of the Headquarters building"](#)





*Front from North-East*

## Architectural design features

The headquarters structure, since named the L. W. Rogers Building, is considered to be an example of the Collegiate Gothic style of design, with influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement in the interior ornamentation.



*Rogers Building, 1927*

The exterior of the building is of Bedford [Indiana] limestone and



rose-colored bricks. Originally the roof was a combination of purple and green slates, long since replaced with gray shingles. Horizontal band courses of stone emphasize the breadth of the structure, and stone dentils decorate the roofline. Many of the windows have ornamental tracings and distinctive shapes. The front entrance is defined by pylons with a carved stone lintel overhead.



*View of library wing from South-West*

The design is highly asymmetrical, in an intentional effort by the architect to make the building appear to have grown organically over the years to meet the changing needs of the occupants. In actual fact, the original design was so well conceived that virtually no exterior changes have been needed in the past decades. The library wing was extended, and an elevator shaft added, but otherwise the building looks much as it did in 1927.

Inside, most rooms were designed simply, with dark wood moldings and accents.



*Bedroom and living room, 1928*





A residential wing lies to the north, with rooms on three levels for staff and guests. Offices and the library are in the south wing, and a garage lies to the west.



*Records Office*

Three areas were designed to be more ornamented - the lobby, the meditation room, and the library. The two-story atrium lobby has an oriel window, paneling, arched ceiling, and balcony. The meditation space, originally called the "Shrine Room," has an inset ceiling, an alcove, and extra ornamentation around the windows and door. The two-story library has a balcony, paneling, decorative light fixtures, and distinctive windows.



*Lobby, 1927*



*Rukmini at Olcott in 1929*

## Activities in the early years

Shortly after moving into the new building, the Society's staff began offering "Wheaton Tea" to local residents. Tea would be served in the library as a welcoming open house on Sunday afternoons, and staff members came to know their Wheaton neighbors. The first public lecture took place on Sunday, May 3, 1928. Summer School was held in Wheaton for the first time in 1929, following the Third World Congress and American convention in Chicago. Annie Besant was present, along with George and Rukmini Arundale.



*Summer School 1929*



Attendance at the Congress was 1269, with 111 at Summer School. A large Norway spruce tree was planted the next year on the spot where Annie Besant had delivered an address to the members.

In addition to maintaining membership and lodge records, staff members ran a large Correspondence School, scheduled national lecturers, and maintained the national library. They also operated the Theosophical Press, which printed books, periodicals, and educational materials.



*Lobby mural*

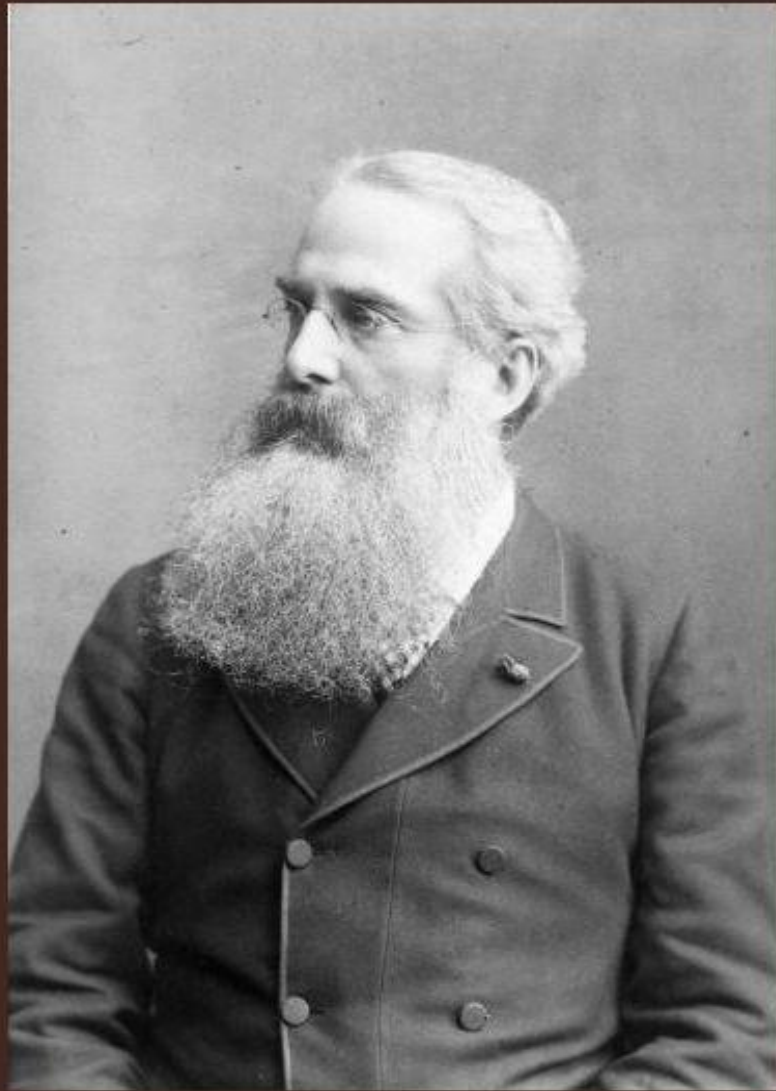
## Lobby decorated with murals

[View additional photos - "Lobby decorated with murals"](#)

In 1931, the four walls of the lobby were transformed when painter Richard Blossom Farley was commissioned to paint murals. He came to Olcott to examine the space, then painted canvas panels in his Philadelphia studio before applying them to the walls. His art beautifully depicts physical and spiritual evolution.



*Lobby mural*



Henry Olcott, 1884

## New names

In 1932 the convention honored Founder-President Henry Steel Olcott. The headquarters campus was named "Olcott" in his memory, at the suggestion of Sidney A. Cook. Postal mail was delivered simply to "Olcott, Wheaton, Illinois." The American Theosophical Society itself was renamed in 1934 to become The Theosophical Society in America (TSA).

The American Section has continued uninterrupted allegiance, though groups departing from the Section have from time to time sought other leadership. The first national Section of the Theosophical Society we have ever been, and though our name has on occasion been changed, we have ever adhered to the parent Society, and to Adyar, where it was established by its founders. We have always been

The Theosophical Society  
In America

and it is with a deeply felt loyalty that the members in Convention in 1934 adopted as our Society's name the style and title legally granted to it —

"THE THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY  
IN AMERICA"

*Part of the document "The Name That Is Ours", September 1934*



[View additional photos - "Entrance arch"](#)



*Entrance Arch, 1940*

## Entrance arch

During the presidency of Sidney Cook, Claude Bragdon was invited to design the arch that serves as the main entrance to the Olcott property. Two stone-and-brick pylons are topped by Platonic solids - an icosahedron and a dodecahedron. Between them extends a graceful wrought-iron arch with the emblem of the Society. A lighted lantern originally hung in the center, but it had to be removed after a few years to accommodate the taller vehicles that now pass underneath. The arch was dedicated in a Co-Masonic ceremony on July 22, 1940 as a surprise event during summer convention, with a speech delivered by L. W. Rogers.



*Entrance Arch Dedication, 1940*



*Building from North, 1938*

## Olcott in the 1930s and 1940s

Many pine and spruce trees were planted in 1932, forming the Sellon Grove. Water gardens and water lily pools developed into prominent features of the front lawn. Eventually the water table changed and the water features were dismantled, but in these early decades water was still a big attraction. By 1934, the original ten acres had expanded to twenty-six (10.5 hectares).

Olcott was still a rural setting in these decades, and Main Street was a little two-lane country road. A tennis court and three quoit-tennis (deck tennis) courts were added in 1933. Staff members and visitors created their own entertainment with skits and plays, lawn games, and occasional forays into downtown Wheaton to the popcorn shop. The Order of the Round Table and Young Theosophist groups were active. Members were encouraged to vacation at Olcott, to aid the Society's spiritual growth "by living on the Estate beautifully, serenely and purposefully."

There were always many visitors, including lecturers Clara Codd, Geoffrey Hodson, George Arundale, Dr. Pieter K. Roest, A. F. Knudsen, Fritz Kunz, Anita Henkel, and Consuelo de Aldag. Mary K. Neff, Joy Mills, and Ann Kerr joined the staff. Sidney Cook became National President in 1931, and James Perkins succeeded him in 1945. Each of them went on to



become Vice President in the international headquarters at Adyar.



*Food line at Convention, 1940*

Annual conventions were regularly held in Wheaton during these years. Staff members would double up in their rooms temporarily, and cots were squeezed into every space available. Many members would room with local Wheaton families, and take their meals at Olcott, usually served on the front lawn. The ladies would wear long dresses in the evenings - not so much for formality as to keep off the mosquitoes. Some years the summer sessions extended for several weeks, with a convention, summer school, and field-worker training.

Radio was becoming a very important means of communication for the Society. Lectures were recorded on 16-inch long-playing "radio" records, and Olcott staff managed the shipment of these programs to radio stations throughout the United States.

During World War II, attendees who could make it to convention were asked to bring along their ration cards. Staff members kept huge gardens of vegetables, fruits, and berries to supply the kitchen, but sugar was rationed. When transportation became difficult in 1944-1945, the Society held "Convention Everywhere" by providing a book of lectures and activities that could be conducted at all the lodges concurrently with the core group at Olcott. After the war, Olcott was a hub of activity, organizing shipments of parcels to European theosophists in need. Several tons of vegetarian food, clothing, soap, and other necessities went to Europe. Books and periodicals went to replace destroyed libraries in many places.

[View additional photos - "Olcott in the 1930s and 1940s"](#)





*Curupumullage Jinarâjadâsa*

## Brother Raja's last visit to Olcott

Curupumullage Jinarâjadâsa was a frequent visitor to the Chicago area for over forty years, and was known to all as CJ or Brother Raja. In February 1953, in declining health, he retired from the international presidency, and Nilakanta Sri Ram was voted into office. Then Brother Raja embarked on what became his final tour. After speaking at the Twenty-first European Federation Congress, he was scheduled to be the featured guest at the annual American convention in July. However, diabetes and heart attacks took their toll, and despite loving care from the Wheaton staff, he passed away at Olcott on June 18 at 5:54 p.m. The manner of his passing was very inspiring to those around him, as he calmly rose above his pain to keep his attendants at ease and give instructions for cremation.

Geoffrey Hodson spoke at a service of remembrance on Sunday, June 21 in the library. After CJ's former secretary Helen Zahara arrived in Wheaton from Adyar on July 17, she helped to scatter his ashes in the waters of the Fox River, assisted by President James Perkins, Kathrine Perkins, Geoffrey Hodson, and Ann Kerr. The "Brother Raja Grove" was planted overlooking the new Perkins Pond in honor of this most beloved visitor.

[View additional photos - "Brother Raja's last visit to Olcott"](#)





*Library addition in 1963*

## Olcott in the 1950s and 1960s

During these decades, Olcott enjoyed visits from lecturers like Geoffrey Hodson and Ernest Wood, Felix and Eunice Layton, and Clara Codd, as well as International Presidents Nilakanta Sri Ram and John B. S. Coats. Longtime Olcott staff member Joy Mills began her first term as President in 1965, taking over from Dr. Henry Smith.

The first addition to the Rogers Building was at the south end, in 1963, when the library was extended by 18 feet (6 meters). The architect was Theosophist Lillian Scott Leenhouts of the Milwaukee Lodge. She preserved the original decorative window by having it moved to the new south wall, and created new space for shelving, offices, and storage. The city of Wheaton finally annexed the Olcott campus in 1966, and the headquarters was connected to the city water supply in place of its well.

The Theosophical Publishing House launched its Quest Books imprint in 1966 with support from The Kern Foundation. Helen Zahara directed the publication of these popular paperback editions. The first title published was *The Essential Unity of All Religions* by Bhagavan Das. During the late 1960s, additional series were established, including Quest Miniatures, Quest Classics, and Re-Quest. The first Quest Film, "How Many Lifetimes?" was produced.



The Theosophical Publishing House moved into its own new building in 1969. Named after Joy Mills, the building houses the TPH offices, a shipping room, Quest Bookshop, and residential space for staff.



[View additional photos - "Olcott in the 1950s and 1960s"](#)

## Olcott in the 1970s and 1980s

Three years after construction of the Joy Mills Building, the Theosophical Publishing needed to expand further, with a warehouse for book storage. The "Victor Russell Memorial Wing" was added to the Joy Mills Building in 1986, giving more space to the Quest Bookshop and the Theosophical Publishing House.



*Warehouse exterior*



From 1976 and 1988 summer conventions were held away from Olcott at a college campus at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, which could accommodate more people onsite and had more recreational facilities. The logistics for remote conventions were found to be difficult, however, and recent conventions have been scheduled at Olcott.

Herbert Kern, John Sellon, and others worked to achieve more financial stability in the Society through creation of the Theosophical Investment Trust in 1976.



*Filming Joy Mills class in library*

Dora Kunz came into the presidency in 1975, bringing her special interest in the connections between Theosophy, science, and healing. The Olcott campus hosted seminars on

these subjects and on Dora's healing method called Therapeutic Touch. Office functions were computerized, and new technologies were embraced in production of films, audio recordings, and videotapes.

During her administration, several notable people visited the national headquarters. In 1978, Sri M. P. Pandit of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, India conducted a seminar on the spiritual life. Lama Anagarika Govinda and his wife visited Olcott in August 1977, and gave public and private lectures. It was not their first stay at Olcott. Previously they had visited in the winter, and were delighted to see snow, running from window to window to watch it fall. After Dora Kunz visited Father Bede Griffiths at his ashram in India, he was persuaded to visit Olcott. The great physicist David Bohm also came to Wheaton for a private visit with Mrs. Kunz.

Virginia Hanson and George Linton met on campus to plan their work, *Readers Guide to the Mahatma Letters*. Bing Escudero and International President Radha Burnier were welcomed as lecturers.

[View additional photos - "Olcott in the 1970s and 1980s"](#)





*His Holiness Dalai Lama greeted by Radha Burnier and Dora Kunz*

## Dalai Lama's visit to Olcott

1981 was a very special year at Olcott, when His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama visited during the summer sessions. Members left convention at Lake Geneva to hear the private lecture at Olcott on "Buddha Nature" and the public lecture "Universal Compassion and Global Crisis" at Wheaton North High School. His Holiness stayed on campus for two nights, along with his attendants and security detail. Another esteemed guest, International President Radha Burnier, was present to greet him.



*Dalai Lama and Radha Burnier, 1981*





*Elevator*

## Olcott in recent years

Dorothy Abbenhouse was President in 1993 when the TSA was heavily involved in planning for the centennial Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. She worked closely with the United Lodge of Theosophists and Grace Knoche of the Theosophical Society in Pasadena to schedule almost 30 lectures and panel discussions, with several events and receptions at Olcott. The headquarters also hosted yearlong planning sessions for youth activities, with Dr. Anton Lysy facilitating the effort. Youth groups of numerous religious backgrounds joined to create an artistic celebration of unity at a plenary session of the Parliament.

President John Algeo took particular interest in increasing the scholarship and education in Wheaton. He established the Olcott Institute, with Dr. Anton Lysy as the Dean of Studies. Michael Gomes, Mary Anderson, Tony Lysy, and John Algeo were among the instructors for some excellent courses of study with Theosophical subject matter. In addition, the institute offered public residential programs through Elderhostel.

Lecturers in these recent decades have included Dr. Stephan Hoeller, Dr. Amit Goswami, Uma Goswami, Dr. Ravi Ravindra, Glenn Mullin, and many others.



An elevator shaft was added to the Rogers Building in 1997, providing wheelchair access to all four floors. During the years of Betty Bland's administration, 2001-2010, many bricks-and-mortar projects were accomplished. A major effort called the Capital Funds Campaign raised money to remodel the bookshop, publishing offices, auditorium, kitchen, and dining room. The library got new furniture, and many upgrades were made to library automation, lighting, smoke detectors, and other infrastructure. The Olcott staff worked hard to improve recycling and environmental awareness, and earned the Earth Flag that proudly hangs on our flagpole.



*Auditorium remodeling*

Under Betty Bland, the Olcott staff organized a number of regional conferences in an effort to draw in new members, and

two TSA-sponsored pilgrimages to Tibet.

In 2010 she and Vice President Tim Boyd had an audience with the Dalai Lama and extended an invitation for His Holiness to visit the Chicago area again. Consequently, Olcott buzzed with activity for months, planning a series of Chicago events centered on the availability of the Dalai Lama in 2011. This time it was no longer feasible to have him stay at Olcott due to stringent security requirements, but he clearly remembered his 1981 visit to the campus, and spoke warmly of the Theosophical Society.



*His Holiness Dalai Lama and Tim Boyd, 2011*

[View additional photos - "Olcott in recent years"](#)





*TheosoFest Vendors*

## TheosoFest and special events

White Lotus Day and Adyar Day are celebrated every year at Olcott with flowers and special programs. Another annual event is TheosoFest, which kicks off the autumn lecture schedule with a Saturday of free public lectures, exhibits, vegetarian food, entertainment, and vendors of diverse merchandise. Attendance in some years has reached four thousand people.

The Olcott grounds host National T'ai Chi and Ji Gong Day each year, and the Maitreya Heart Relic Tour has twice stopped in Wheaton. Numerous special workshops, seminars, and retreats have been held over the years. Summer National Gathering is the current name for the national convention, which is usually held in July. Field workers from study groups are introduced to the resources and methods of the TSA at an "Olcott Experience" held every year or two.

Other special events at Olcott have included conferences of the Inter-American Theosophical Federation and the Theosophical Order of Service, and in 2012, the International Theosophical Conference.

[View additional photos - "TheosoFest and special events"](#)





*Benches at Edward Paul Smith Memorial*

## Features of the grounds

The grounds at Olcott are open to the public every day from dawn to dusk. Certain features of the grounds are particularly notable. The Perkins Pond was personally excavated by President James Perkins. Ducks and geese find it irresistible, and occasionally a heron or crane makes a visit. T'ai chi classes and summer concerts have used the pond as a backdrop, and guests enjoy strolling around. Wildlife sightings are common, including great horned owls, hawks, wild turkeys, chimney swifts, and many song birds.

On the west side of the property there is a large fire pit surrounded by benches, built by the Young Theosophists in 1954. Called the Youth Circle, it is often used by drumming groups. Nearby is the Labyrinth, a very popular destination for Olcott visitors. The Garden of Remembrance, like its counterparts at other Theosophical Society centers, is a place of serene reflection. Several other groves and memorial sites commemorate the lives of individuals who made significant contributions to the life of the Society.

[View additional photos - "Features of the grounds"](#)





*Panel painting in Meditation Room*

## Art

Over the years many works of art arrived to decorate the headquarters buildings and campus. In some cases the artists or their families have donated the works, and in other cases collectors have shared their treasures. Murals in the lobby make a strong impression as visitors first enter the Rogers Building. The anteroom to the auditorium serves as an art gallery for exhibits of contemporary artists in wide-ranging media and themes.

The Meditation Room has sacred art from diverse religious traditions. Art works range from an early Italian Renaissance panel of the Madonna to a Tibetan Buddhist thanka donated by the Dalai Lama. The large portrait of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky was painted by Gutzon Borglum, best known as the sculptor of Mount Rushmore, Stone Mountain, and other great monuments. He painted it at the request of his Theosophist father, president of the Omaha, Nebraska lodge, using one of the famous Reston photographs as a model. Just outside the Meditation Room door are the lovely pastels *Antahkarana* and *Mandorla* by Memphis Lodge member Burton Callicott.

A late Italian Renaissance painting of the Madonna and Child by Il Moretto hangs above the library's fireplace. It was donated by Herbert Kern, who purchased it from the estate of Henry



Hotchener, the editor of *World Theosophy*. The Kern family also contributed two modern sculptures that are found outside in front of the building. *Slant* by David Middlebrook, symbolizes matter rising to be spiritualized, and *Tantric Circle* by Michael Todd, seems to be a magical ring opening onto cosmic space.



*Madonna by Il Moreto*

Many other art works are found throughout the building. There are galleries of photographs of all the national and international presidents, and, of course, the main Founders of the Theosophical Society - Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and William Quan Judge. The Society's emblem can be seen rendered in embroidery, appliqué, bronze, cut paper, pencil drawings, and paintings. Busts of Annie Besant and L. W.

Rogers are on display, along with pottery by the great Beatrice Wood. Among the more modern works are a starburst painting by Pam Lowrie; *Untitled* and *Sojourn*, aluminum sculptures by James Martin; and *Demon Queller* and other works by Don Kruse. Two of the newest art works to arrive at Olcott are a portrait of Krishnamurti painted in 1926 by local member Henry Schwartz, and a lovely little Boddhisattva given to Henry Olcott in China and donated recently by Joseph E. Ross.



*Art gallery*

[View additional photos - "Art"](#)





*Library*

## H. S. Olcott Memorial Library

The Henry Steel Olcott Memorial Library, formerly called the Olcott Library and Research Center, is a major resource of the Society.

L. W. Rogers called for establishment of a national lending library in 1922, and members donated many volumes. During Joy Mills' administration, in 1967, Seetha Neelakantan was brought from India to supervise expansion and cataloging of the large Eastern religions collection. She implemented the modified Dewey Decimal system that was developed in the Adyar Library and Research Centre.

Other major segments of the book collection are Theosophical works, organized by author; and books on Western religion, philosophy, science, healing, and the arts, which are arranged in a standard Dewey numbering scheme. There are also miniature books, novels, biographies, reference, and children's books, along with excellent collections of periodicals and pamphlets. Audiovisual materials include hundreds of audiotapes, compact discs, videotapes, and DVDs, with numerous recordings of Theosophical Society lectures and workshops. The Rare Books Room holds the Boris de Zirkoff, Mary K. Neff, and other special collections of books. Dissertations, microfilm, and other materials are in a "noncirculating" room. The Kern Room



provides a meeting place for the Board and other groups.

Members nationwide borrow library materials as a benefit of their TSA membership. Items are shipped free, and the members are responsible for return shipping. Patrons simply select an item in the library's online catalog and the library is notified automatically to ship. It is also possible to become a local or remote member of the library at a lower cost than Society membership. The library does not ship to foreign countries. Theosophical lodges also borrow materials frequently, and large starter libraries are loaned to newly-formed study groups. The library also offers a rich selection of research materials and reading lists on its web page.

Interlibrary loan is another service that the library provides, shipping materials to academic and public libraries across the country. The high level of ILL borrowing reflects the uniqueness of Olcott collection and the degree of scholarly interest in the theosophical movement. Reference service is another major activity in the library, as researchers frequently ask for help in person, on the telephone, and in e-mail messages. The library belongs to a consortium of local libraries, sharing an online catalog and other infrastructure. Many local residents now borrow books through the consortium, so Theosophists are sharing the collection with the wider community.

From its earliest days, the library has been a beehive of activity. It was the main location at Olcott for lectures and open houses, well into the 1970s, when the auditorium came into more use. The Wheaton Olcott Lodge, two staff study groups, and a spiritual roundtable meet in the library weekly. Numerous other activities such as musical performances, staff celebrations, and book sales frequently take place in the library, and it has been the site of quite a few weddings. Webcasts and webinars are

now broadcast from the library several times each week, and people participate worldwide over the Internet.



*Library*

The Archives Department is associated with the library. In addition to organizational records of the TSA, the archival collections include papers from Boris de Zirkoff, Fritz and Dora Kunz, and other Theosophists; and records of some lodges, federations, and other organizations. There are photograph albums from Clara Codd, Sidney Cook, Geoffrey Hodson, and Helen Zahara. Archives are in many formats, including films, slides, artifacts, art works, audiovisual recordings, and computer files. The archivist provides research assistance to staff, members, and academics worldwide.

[View additional photos - "H. S. Olcott Memorial Library"](#)





*Quest Bookshop*

## Quest Bookshop

The Quest Bookshop is a very special corner of the Olcott campus. In addition to an amazing array of books on Theosophy, spirituality, and related topics, it offers gift items such as calendars, cards, crystals, singing bowls, jewelry, and meditation cushions. Visitors are welcome to enjoy a cup of tea in the bookshop's comfortable lounge area.



*Mills Building exterior*

[View additional photos - "Quest Bookshop"](#)





*Signs*

## Visits to Olcott

Members of the Theosophical Society and academic researchers often visit Olcott for day trips, self-directed retreats, or extended periods in a work-study program. Many arrive by car, but some walk about two miles (about 3 km) from the Wheaton train station. A local bus stops at the front driveway, but it is infrequent. During conventions a shuttle service is available to a local hotel.

The rhythm of the Olcott's day is governed by the chimes of the stately grandfather clock in the lobby. Grandfather lets staff members and guests know when group meditation begins at 8:30 each morning; the commencement of the lunch hour at noon; and afternoon tea at 3:00 pm. During tea time, people walk the grounds, play pool and ping-pong in the basement, or lounge in the family room. The entire campus is vegetarian and alcohol-free. Delicious vegetarian lunches are available for the staff and guests on weekdays, and during conventions the kitchen hums with activity as three meals are prepared each day.

Staff members and volunteers are busily engaged in diverse activities - member services, audiovisual production, publication of books and periodicals, programming, lodge support, library work, accounting, prison correspondence, Web design, housekeeping, and grounds maintenance. However, visitors will



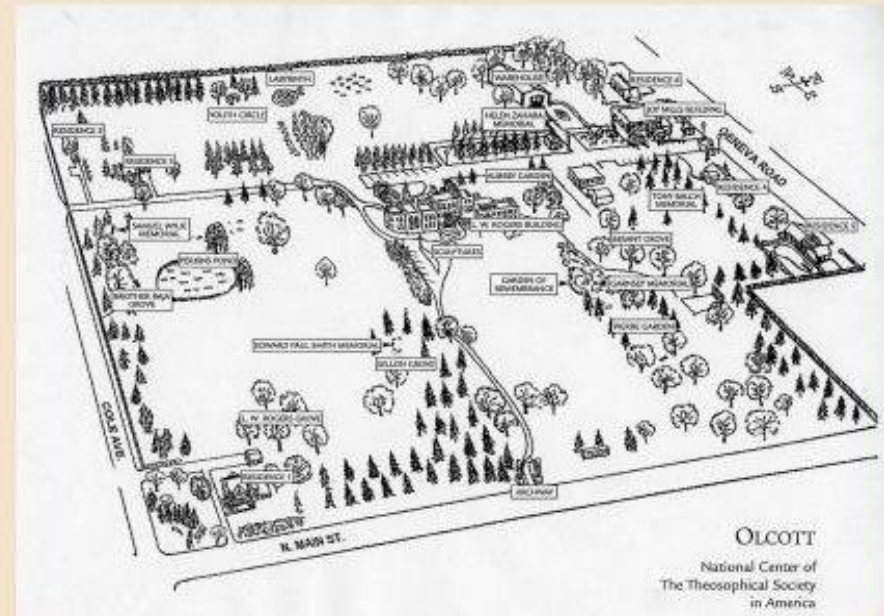
always find them ready to answer questions and conduct tours. The national library is staffed six days and three evenings each week through most of the year, with a reduced schedule in the summer. Wireless Internet service is available throughout the campus, and staff members are glad to assist with office services such as photocopying and fax transmittal.



*Cook Jeff Gresko with fresh bread*

Visits should be planned well in advance, because the facilities are much in demand. It is particularly recommended that prospective visitors consult our program listings on the TSA Website to see what activities are offered on the days of the visit. Through most of the year, a public lecture is held on

Thursday evening, and Olcott has a very full schedule of classes, study sessions, and healing groups.



*Olcott campus map*

[View additional photos - "Visits to Olcott"](#)





## In closing

English Theosophist and lecturer Clara Codd keenly felt the importance of Olcott's position in the heartland of the United States. She wrote that "I wake in the morning and find my aura as big as America and all my heart and mind flowing America-wards." While she found the headquarters building "noble and beautiful," she regarded the home of the Society as an instrument rather than a shrine. "The temple of humanity's future happiness and freedom is built with the stones of individual hearts and minds." Henry S. Olcott was told by the Mahatmas that his dharma was to organize and keep alive the "body" through which the Ancient Wisdom would come to the world. The place named in his honor is an outer structure that helps the serve the body of the Theosophical Society, carrying on the dharma of its namesake.

Continue to photo gallery  
and discover some additional charming views of Olcott



## Additional photos







*Mr. Gill with tractor, July 24, 1927*



*Water garden, May 9, 1925*



*Water garden from South-East, August 25, 1925*



*Grove from North-East, August 8, 1926*



View through branches

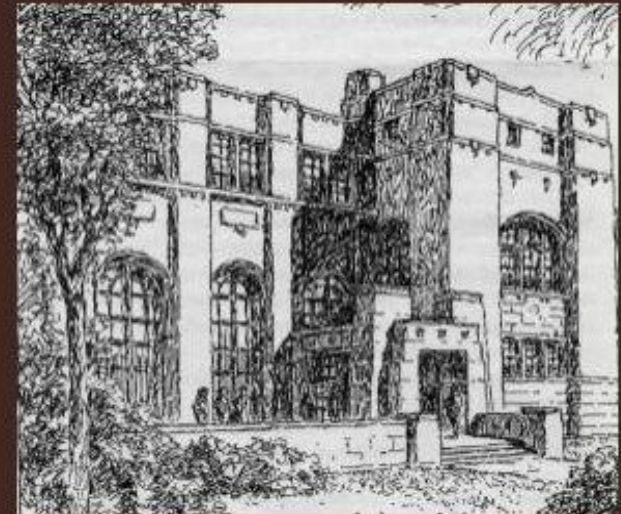




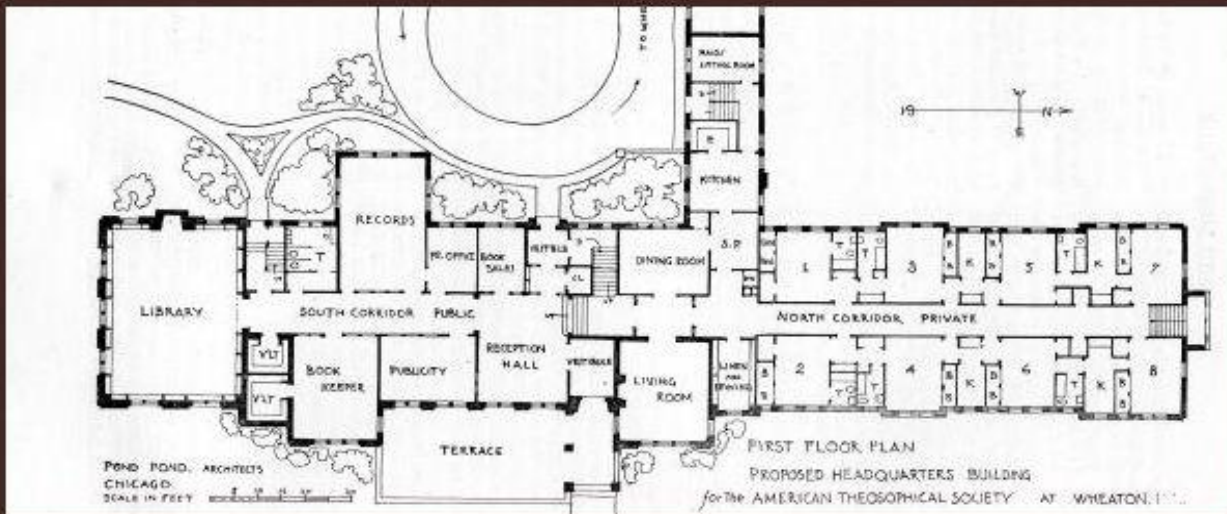
Construction of the Headquarters building



Architect color sketch



Architect drawing of entrance



Architect drawing of main floor, 1926



Architect drawing of HQ from North-East



Construction of the Headquarters building



Bond



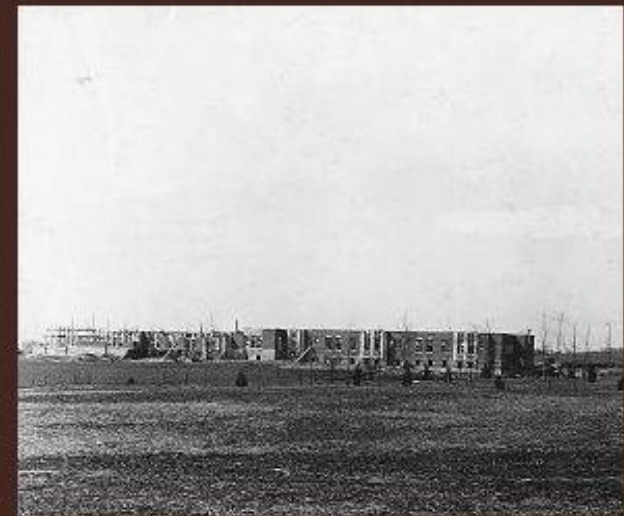
Cornerstone ceremony crowds



Construction, 1926



Construction, 1926



Construction, March 1927





*L.W. Rogers, A. Besant and Krishnamurti, 1926*



Headquarters American Theosophical Society  
Wheaton, Illinois 1927

*Building in late 1927 with new driveway*



*Cleaning crew, 1927*



*Staff at Dinner, 1927*

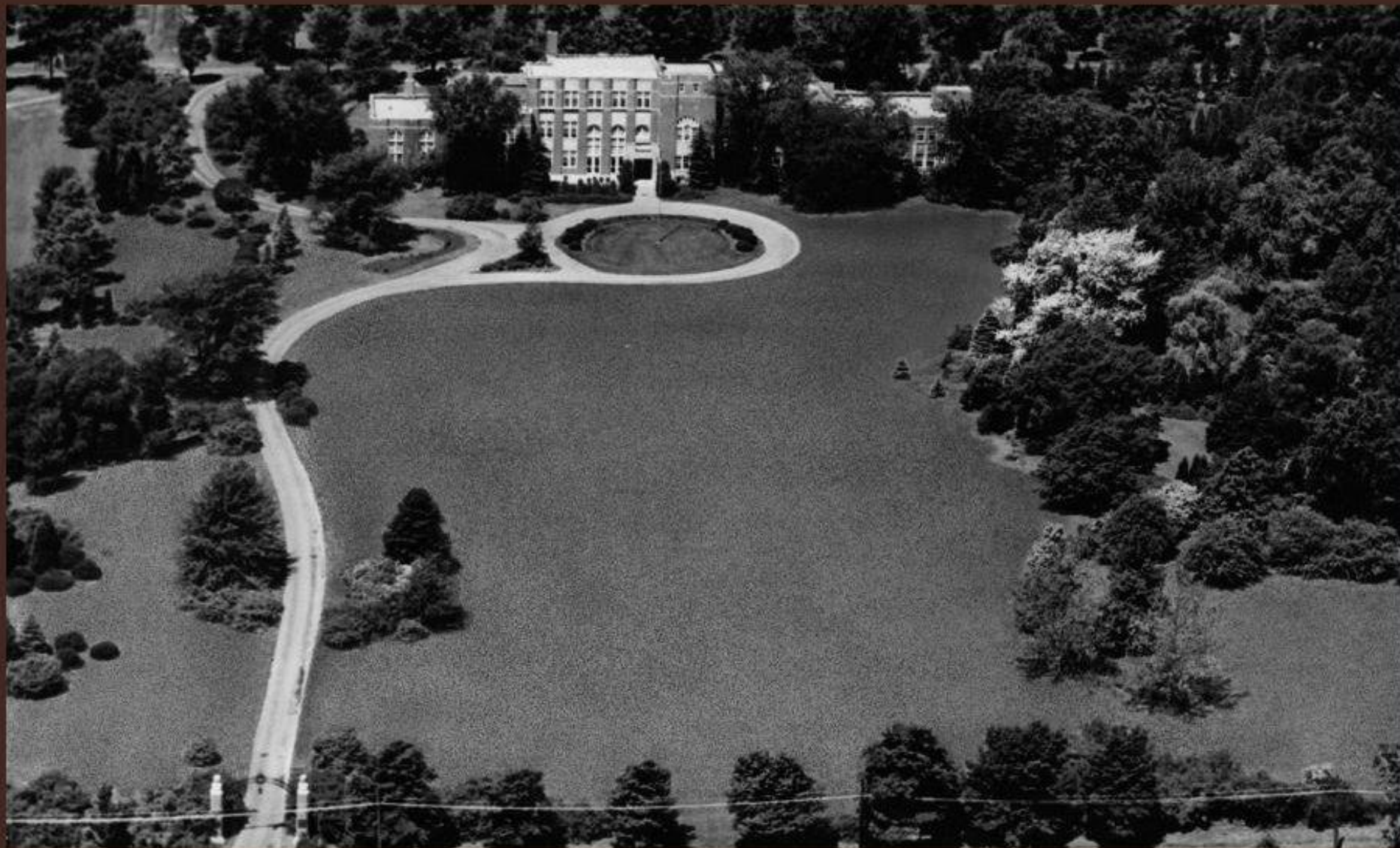


L.W. Rogers, National President,  
works at his desk in the newly completed office, 1928.

*L. W. Rogers at desk, 1927*



Aerial view







*Mural flying figure 1*



*Mural starburst*



*Mural flying figure 2*



*Mural interlaced triangles*



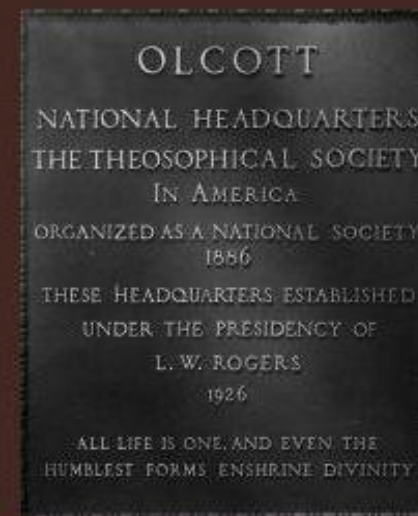
Pond in autumn







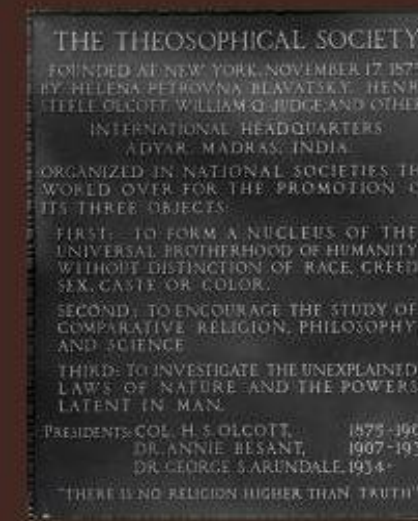
*Entrance Arch Dedication Processional*



*North Plaque*



*View from street, 2007*



*South Plaque*



Entrance arch in autumn





Olcott in the 1930s and 1940s



*Main Street entrance, 1941*



*Front Drive, 1940*



*Creek, July 1940*



*Water garden*



*Arundales and Cook on lawn*



Olcott in the 1930s and 1940s



**OLCOTT SESSIONS**  
SUMMER 1933

**RATES**  
**OLCOTT INSTITUTE**  
July 29 to August 31  
(Including Summer School, Aug. 5 to 11)

<b>Registration, Room and Board</b>	<b>1 week</b>	<b>Period*</b>
Cost to Theological Society — starting meals and private bath with 2 or 3 others	\$25.00	\$47.50
Cost to Theological Society — starting general admission	15.00	27.50
Room and bath in village — board of Theological Society	25.00	37.50
*Week including Convention and Convention week before. Payment of water required the first week (the rate of the preceding full week.)		

**CONVENTION August 12 to 13\*\***  
**Registration, Room and Board**

Cost to Theological Society — starting meals and private bath with 2 or 3 others	\$10.00
Cost to Theological Society — starting general admission	5.00
Room and bath in village — board of Theological Society	25.00
Registration and room eight of 1933 — Room eight of 1933 and breakfast (1933 included in 1933) — the middle 8 days only.	25.00

**SUMMER SCHOOL and CONVENTION August 5 to 11**  
**Registration, Room and Board**

Cost to Theological Society — starting meals and private bath with 2 or 3 others	\$20.00
Cost to Theological Society — starting general admission	10.00
Room and bath in village — board of Theological Society	25.00
Registration and room eight of 1933 — Room eight of 1933 and breakfast (1933 included in 1933) — the middle 8 days only.	25.00

**REGISTRATION ONLY**

Olcott Institute (including Summer School)	Per day	1 week	2 weeks
Summer School	5.00	25.00	47.50
Conventions, full period, 22.00			


**BOARD WITHOUT ROOM**

Per day \$1.00	1 week	2 weeks
	25.00	50.00

Convention 1933

49th Annual Convention  
and Summer School

The Theological Society  
in America



Jubilee Anniversary  
1875-1924

OLCOTT  
August 10 to August 21, 1935

Chairman of Convention  
REV. C. H. SHARADIPPA

Convention 1935




**51<sup>ST</sup> ANNUAL CONVENTION**

THE THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY IN AMERICA  
OLCOTT-WHEATON, ILL.  
CONVENTION AUG. 1-11

Convention 1937

**FIFTY-FOURTH ANNUAL CONVENTION**  
OLCOTT—JULY 29 TO 31



**SUMMER SCHOOL JULY 25 TO 31**

Convention 1940



Etha Snodgrass at 1939 convention



Summer School Tent, 1949





*Children at 1948 Summer School*



*Round Table*



*Sidney Cook*



*Mary K. Neff*



*Clara Codd*



*Cook leaving Olcott*



Building from North-East, 1931







*C. Jinarajadasa ashes in Fox River*



*Brother Raja Grove plaque*



*C. Jinarajadasa and S. Cook*



*C. Jinarajadasa*



*C. Jinarajadasa memorial in library, 1953*

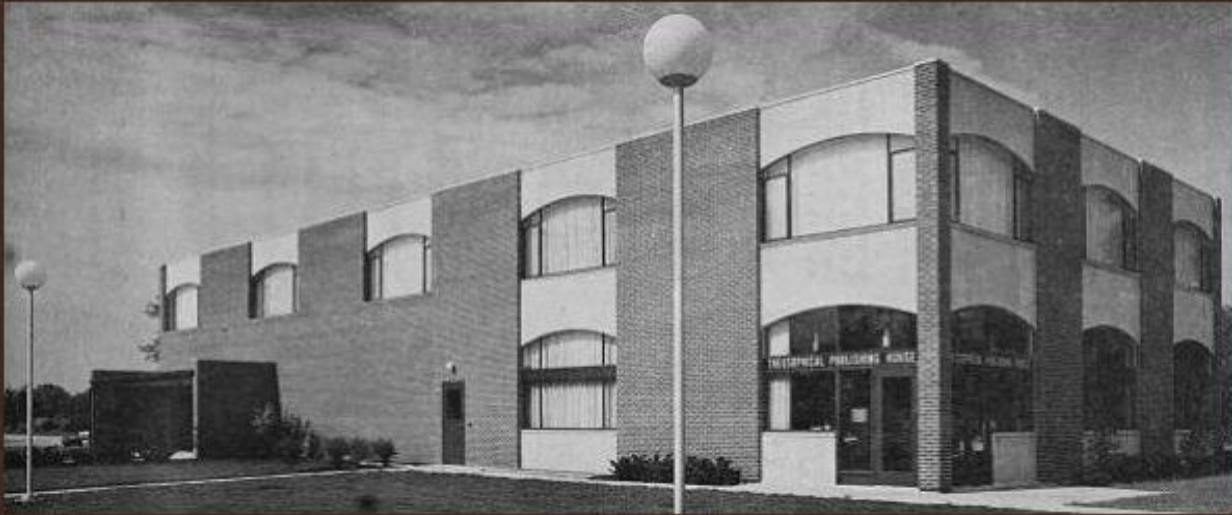


Misty pond





Olcott in the 1950s and 1960s



*Joy Mills Building*



*Joy Mills Building bookshop*



*Snow scene*



*Lily pool*



*Tent*





*Olcott Staff, 1958*



*John Coats and Clara Codd*



*Ernest Wood*



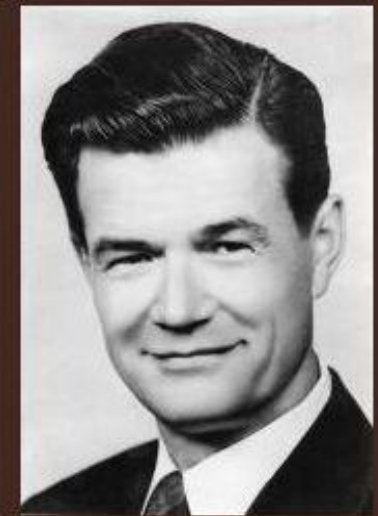
*Geoffrey Hodson*



*Sri Ram*



*Eunice Layton*



*Felix Layton*



Spring flowers







*Board meeting*



*Computerization*



*Bing Escudero*



*Dora Kunz*



*Virginia Hanson*



*Radha Burnier*



*Herbert Kern*



Front from South-East in winter





Olcott in recent years



*Auditorium*



*Family event*



*Tornado damage, 2008*



*Tree planting, 2008*



*Gardening by Mills Building, 2009*



Olcott in recent years



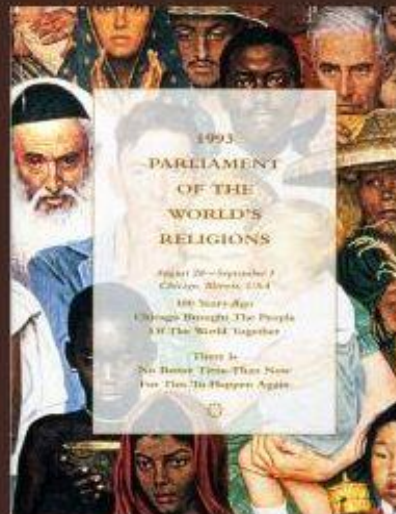
*Fun night at summer convention*



*Olcott Drama Troupe*



*Children's activities*



*Parliament 1993*



*Parliament youth program*



*Earth Flag*



Olcott in recent years



*Grace Knoche, Joy Mills, D. Abbenhouse*



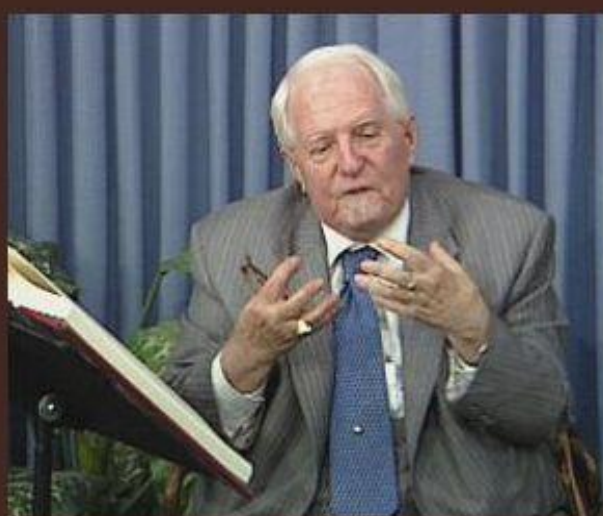
*John Kern and Joy Mills*



*John and Adele Algeo*



*Glenn Mullin*



*Stephan Hoeller*



*Tony Lysy*





*Staff Christmas party*



*Adam and Rosemary Warcup*



*Staff 2009*



*Betty B., Tim B., His Holiness Dalai Lama, Lily B., David B.*



Front view







*TheosoFest gong meditation intro*



*TheosoFest lecture*



*TheosoFest painting activity*



*IATF congress 2008*



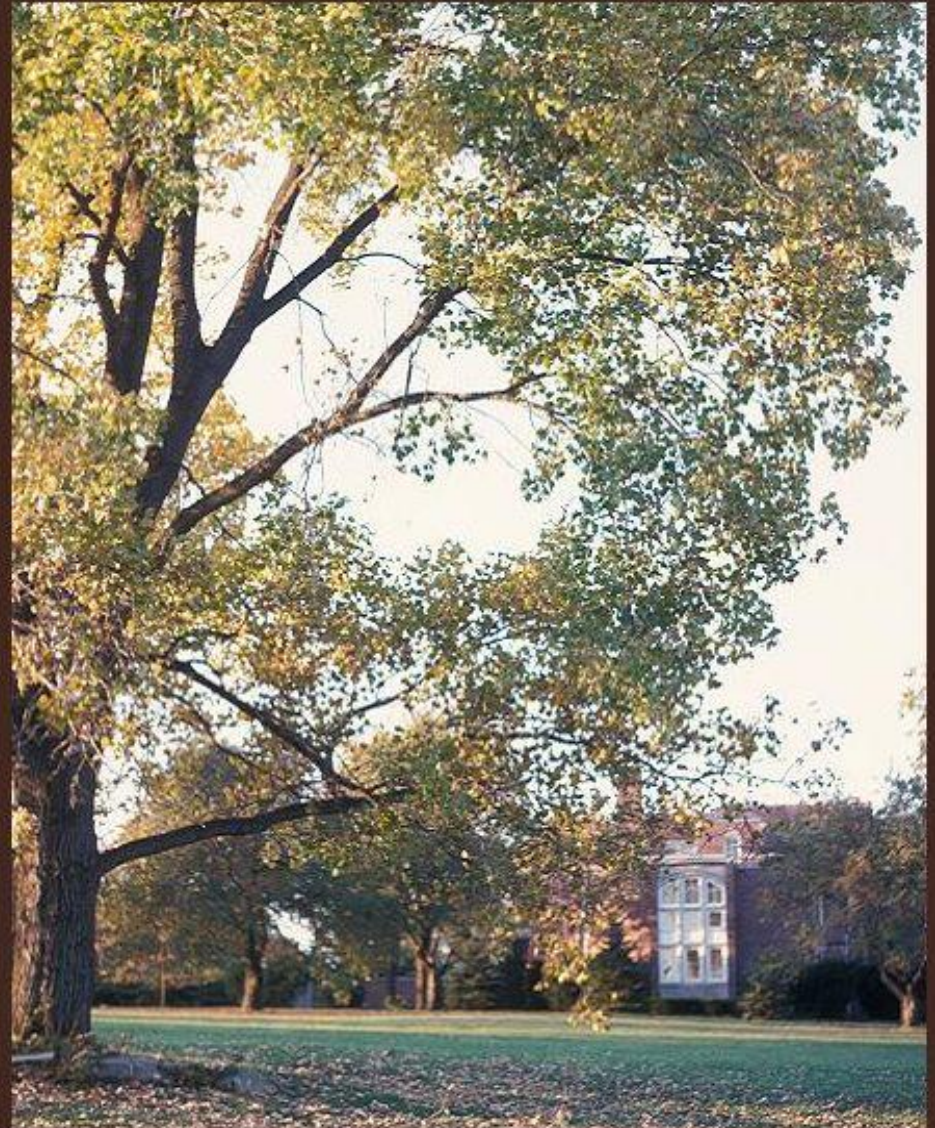
*Tai Chi, Ji Gong Day*



Picnic tables in windbreak



Library from due south







*Drumming at youth circle*



*Garden of Remembrance*



*Labyrinth*



*Tai Chi by pond*



*Geese by pond*



Bee on flower and Grapes (below)



Beetle on flower and Sumac (below)







*Antahkarana by Burton Callicott*



*Demon Queller by Dan Kruse*



*Thangka from Dalai Lama in Meditation Room*



*Buddhist art in Meditation Room*



*Persian kilim rug in Meditation Room*



*Painting by Pam Lowrie*



*HPB by Gutzon Borglum*



*Bodhisattva owned by HSO*



*Bust of Annie Besant*



Front lawn in autumn







*Library*



*Library*



*Library*



*Library discussion group*



*Library performance*



View of library wing from South-West







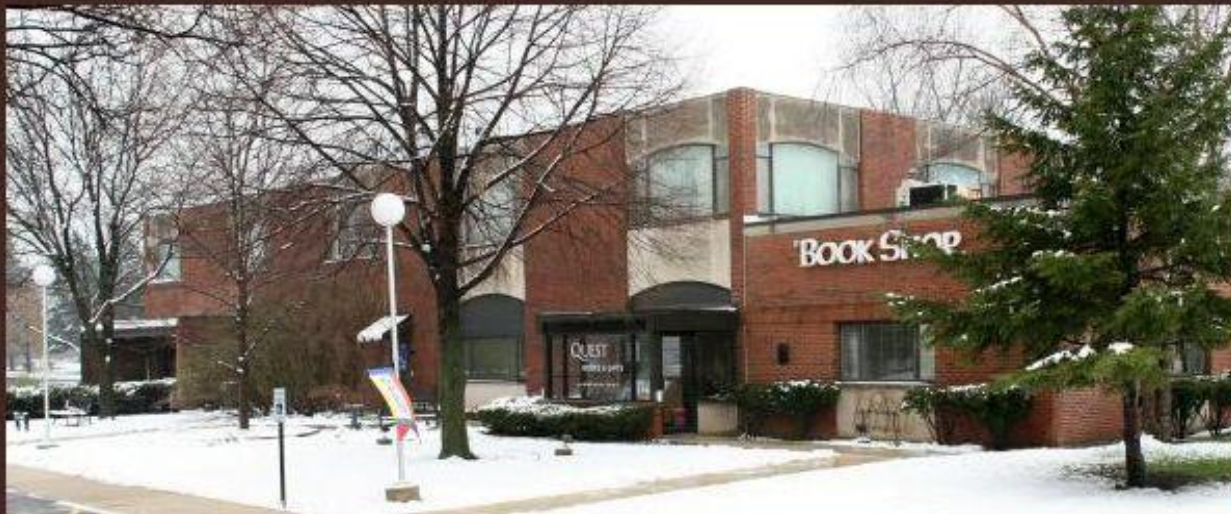
*Bookshop interior*



*Bookshop interior*



*Bookshop lounge area*



*Mills Building exterior*



*Quest Bookshop*



Building from North-West







*Olcott campus - main hall*



*Meditation Room*



*Meditation Room*



*Olcott campus - family room*



*Guest room*



*Cafeteria line*



Rogers Building in winter





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