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The John P. Cook Dormitory, 1931

There was a long gap, particularly long for those students and faculty left in the “old” Law Building, between the dedication of the Lawyers Club in 1925 and the start of construction of the rest of the buildings. It was not until January 1929 that Cook announced he would give money for the Legal Research Building. In April, he promised to erect a dormitory, and asked that it be called the John P. Cook Building in memory of his father, who was prominent in the Territory and later the State of Michigan. He did not, in either statement, make a commitment to build the “Law Building”, which he would ask be named after Harry Hutchins and is now Hutchins Hall. The John P. Cook dormitory, which runs along Tappan across from the **Martha Cook Building**, was begun in 1929 and completed in 1930.



The John P. Cook building in March, 1930;
In the background, frame of the Legal Research Library.

Source: Bentley Historical Library

Cook’s April 29 letter to the Board of Regents also said: “When the larger dormitory building is built on the southeast corner of the Law Quadrangle I would wish it to be called the Thomas M. Cooley Building.” [Brown, p. 320]. This “larger dormitory” was never built. The space is now occupied by the underground Allan and Alene Smith Law Library Addition. In the late 1990’s, the Law School considered building on that space—on top of the underground addition—pursuant to an imaginative design by renowned architect Renzo Piano, but that plan was set aside in favor of a new building on the south side of Monroe.

The Cook dormitory contains the John P. Cook Memorial Room, handsomely paneled with a fireplace over which hangs a portrait of John P. Cook, the gift of William. A letter from father to son is displayed along with the portrait. Dated April 16, 1875, it reads:

My boy, William, seventeen years old. In ten years’ time your course of life will undoubtedly be settled upon. These two years of your life to come will probably control your whole future. May you pass through them observing the same temperate habits you have maintained thus far, and always in the future observe the recognized rules of success—morality, virtue, industry, and economy. With my prayers for your future success and greatness, Your father, John P. Cook. [Forsyth p. 8]

The large bay extending towards Tappan Street, across from the **Martha Cook Building**, a women’s dormitory, is inscribed on the exterior with words Cook wrote: “John P. Cook, intrinsically a great man, prominent in the territory, and later in the state.”

A highlight of the interior are windows with stained glass medallions that have stylized wreaths inscribed within them. These circumscribe symbols of eight branches of law: religious (sacred books), moral (tables of the law), ceremonial (burning altar), natural (helmet and shield), common (wig, gown, and gavel), international (flags and fasces), civil (sword and balance), and statute (scroll and scepter) law. [Forsyth p. 48-49]