Widener Reborn

On the afternoon of October 1, three students with gleaming brass horns, from each of which a banner emblazoned with an “H” hung down, mounted the stylobate of Widener Library and blew a fanfare. Benefactor Katherine B. Loker, D.H.L. ’00, stepped to a crimson ribbon stretched across the vast front steps and, with the help of student representatives Dareema Jenkins ’05 and Matthew Gibson ’05, cut it with jumbo scissors. The gesture marked the rededication of the 89-year-old building at the end of a five-year, $92-million makeover project reported in these pages at many stages along the way.

“It has been a fascinating five years,” said William C. Kirby, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, in brief remarks at the ceremony. “Those who study and work in this University have witnessed extraordinary feats of construction and reconstruction. We have marvelled at the trucks and trusses and certainly that enormous crane lifting glass and steel to rather nerve-racking heights. Not to mention the daily symphony of hammering, drilling, pounding, sawing, and ringing.”

The first phase of the project brought modern heating, ventilation, air-conditioning, humidity-control, electrical, lighting, fire-detection and suppression, and security systems to the 10 floors of stacks. Staff moved, cleaned, and reshelved all 3.5 million books. Workers from contractors Lee Kennedy built a staff workspace and two new reading rooms, to the design of architects Einhorn Yaffe Prescott, in what had been the two interior lightcourts of the library. In phase two of the project, attention shifted to the front half of the building. The great reading room regained its original size, splendor, and serenity, while noisy, interactive library services moved to refurbished or newly constructed spaces.

Workers lifted 191 tons of steel into lightcourts; removed 92 tons of demolition debris from the nether regions of D-Level and 150 tons of ductwork and cast-iron debris from the attic; installed 55 miles of electrical cable, 15 miles of fire-alarm cable, 18 miles of electrical conduit, and 11 miles of “tel/data” cable; placed 5 miles of sprinkler piping, with 5,000 heads.

Yesterday’s News

From the pages of the Harvard Alumni Bulletin and Harvard Magazine

1914 Harvard spoils the dedication of the Yale Bowl by defeating the Elis, 36-0. The popular jest is that Yale supplied the bowl and Harvard provided the punch.

1924 The Debating Union sponsors a discussion of the resolution “That Harvard is, and should continue to be, indifferent.” The vote from the floor at the close of the meeting runs 30-3 in favor of the statement that Harvard is indifferent, 34-9 in favor of the idea that it should be.

1934 A Crimson poll of faculty and students reveals sentiments approaching two to one against New Deal policies.

1939 The American Independence League, dedicated to keeping the United States out of the European war, has one of its largest chapters at Harvard, where more than 700 students are members.

1949 Brand-new ashtrays on tables signal that smoking is now permitted in all but the west end of Widener’s main reading room. Librarians explain that the departure of undergraduates to Lamont has made it possible to ventilate the area and thus permit readers to light up.

1954 Harvard announces plans for a new health center on Mount Auburn Street that will offer professional care 24 hours a day, 52 weeks a year.

1959 Harvard refuses more than $350,000 in student-loan money offered by the National Defense Education Act if needy students submit an oath and affidavit both of loyalty and non-Communist affiliation; President Pusey says the demand singles out college students as a group not worthy of the nation’s trust.

1969 More than a thousand students enroll in the seven courses offered by the department of Afro-American studies.

1979 Coming off a dismal 2-6 season, Harvard faces an undefeated Yale team before 72,000 spectators at the Yale Bowl and pulls off a 22-7 rout.

1984 The Faculty of Arts and Sciences reports that the number of tenured women has almost doubled in the past three years, to 21 of 355 senior faculty members (5.9 percent).
Size matters, but elevation matters more. Tall, long-legged Kaego Ogbechie '05 can do almost anything on a volleyball court, in ways that literally rise above the crowd. Ogbechie (ohg-bay-chay) isn't shy about her height—"It doesn't stop me from wearing three-inch heels!" she declares—which actually is about average for a middle hitter in women's volleyball. However, it is not long femurs but powerful leg muscles that launch her astonishing 30-inch vertical leaps. Add an upstretched arm, and the 5 foot, 11 inch, Ogbechie might swat a ball 10 feet in the air, the height of a basketball rim. Nice to roam the ionosphere like that, since the top of the volleyball net is only a bit over seven feet above the ground.

With six players per side, volleyball’s basic setup puts three of them in the front line and three in the back. The players rotate positions each time the serve changes hands. And they specialize: the front line desirably includes two outside hitters flanking the middle hitter, with the setter and two liberos (defensive specialists) in back; by making substitutions as players rotate, coaches can approximate this arrangement. Hitters specialize in putting balls away with kill shots, and liberos in “digging”—retrieving opponents’ shots to keep the point alive. The setter aims to deliver easily hittable balls, ripe for the killing, to her hitters in front.

Consider this hypothetical play: Harvard has Dartmouth on the defensive, and the Big Green clears the ball over the net—a “free ball,” since it’s there for the taking. The volleyball traces a big, lazy arc through the air until intercepted by a Harvard player who passes it to setter Kim Gould ’05. Co-captain Gould calls out, “Thirty-two!” (The three in the number means she will send the ball to location number three on the front line; the two means the ball will rise about twice its width above the net.) Left outside hitter Pernilla “Nilly” Schweitzer ’05 (like Ogbechie, a tall Californian) awaits, greedily yelling “32! 32!”—in other words, “Give me the ball!” But this play is a “tandem ball,” sent to two hitters, so Ogbechie and Schweitzer both converge at the net, moving in from the 10-foot line, rubber soles squeaking. Across the net, two rangy Dartmouth defenders close in, raising both arms aloft to thwart the impending attack. Schweitzer’s right hand is cocked to hit, and one Dartmouth player shifts sideways to stop her. But accepting the decoy leaves only one blocker on middle hitter Ogbechie, a fatal mistake. High aloft, Ogbechie selects her