

News and views

New Housing for the AIP

THE American Institute of Physics needs more working space. The building at 57 East 55th Street, purchased with the contributions of physicists in 1943, has now become crowded and is inadequate for the future. The reasons for this unexpectedly rapid obsolescence may be found in the record of the last ten fast-moving years. What has happened to the Institute merely reflects what has happened to physics, and this in turn is tied up with what has happened to the world in these ten years. Perhaps this general comment is convincing enough, but specific measures of the Institute's altered situation are at hand.

In the year 1944, when the AIP moved from the old Flatiron Building to its present address, the statistics in the first column of the following table were recorded. The analogous figures for 1954 are given in the second column:

	1944	1954
Pages published	4 340	17 050
Subscriptions handled	20 102	63 421
Page charge, reprint and back number transactions	4 647	13 573
Employees	25	58
Dollar volume of business (approximate)	\$250 000	\$1 055 700

The above figures need qualification, of course. The pre-war high for pages was 6834, publication in 1944 being curtailed by the war. On the other hand, printing composition changes have been made so that the 17 050 pages in 1954 are equivalent to some 23 000 pre-war pages. The dollar figure for 1954 must be discounted heavily for the inflation that has occurred. It nevertheless reflects additional assignments of work to the Institute by the Member Societies and a number of special projects. In 1954 all special projects accounted for \$73 379.89 of which those for the Government were \$44 716.43. Now in 1955 a new subsidy of \$40 000 has been received from the National Science Foundation toward a periodical translation of a Russian physics journal.

The present building has been invaluable in consolidating the work of the physics organization and in serving as a visible symbol of the stature and unity of physics in America. It has abundantly justified the

original investment. Nevertheless, as office space it is not efficient, having many cubic feet devoted to halls, corridors, ornamental stairways, and unnecessary ceiling heights. This did not matter at first. The 25 employees simply used the best space. As the staff has grown, the cost of making sub-standard space usable has been considerable. Partitions have been removed, modern lighting and ventilation have been introduced, much paint and acoustic tile have been put on walls and ceilings, plumbing and wiring have been replaced, and new rest rooms have been built. The one committee room is now in daily use as a working office.

About all of the cheap ways to increase effective floor space have now been resorted to. A thorough study with an architect and builders as to what might be done next proved discouraging. It would be very costly to convert the ornate and high-ceilinged second floor to efficient, well-lighted office space. An addition could be built in the rear to add 1500 square feet, but at a cost of \$60 000! A modern elevator, already needed by our growing staff, would be a further item, so it is clear that expansion at 57 East 55th Street is not a promising solution of our housing problem.

The Governing Board of the Institute has been concerned about the housing problem for two years, and has discussed a number of alternative solutions. Flight to the country to secure cheaper land and building costs is one, although a rural site would not be convenient for some kinds of business or committee meetings. Removal to a "less expensive" city is another solution, but little enthusiasm for such a move has developed. Any move from New York would involve considerable re-staffing and employee training. It would be possible to move some AIP activities elsewhere and keep the present building as the main office, but this would probably involve increased administrative expense.

The Institute's staff officers are currently trying to find some kind of real-estate trade in which the Institute's present building, situated as it is in a region of greatly appreciated values, could be offered against larger space in a less expensive neighborhood. Any advantage to the Institute in such a trade could be applied toward costs of remodeling and moving.

At 57 East 55th Street about 6500 net usable square feet of floor space is available at present. It is just enough for the work of the Institute as reflected in the 1954 column of the table presented earlier. Ten years from now the Institute's load may well be increased by a factor of two. Extrapolation of past trends indicates this to be an underestimate. The number of employees needed should not go up by the same factor as the load, so perhaps 100 is a satisfactory figure to assume. Some may be eliminated by greater mechanization, but the mechanical devices need space. In conclusion, it seems foolish to make any move or large investment which does not yield 12 000 to 15 000 square feet of net usable floor space, and even then it would be best to have the possibility of further expansion at a reasonable price.