

REAL ESTATE

Historic building breaks ground on addition mapped out in 1920s

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The Julia Ideson Building is undergoing a belated expansion that has been on the drawing board since the 1920s.

Future expansion was part of the original blueprint when the repository for many rare books and historic Houston photographs opened in 1926, but the Great Depression scrapped plans for any new construction.

After 85 years, ground was broken this week on the new archival wing to the 61,700-square-foot building at 500 McKinney in downtown Houston that's named after Houston's first professional librarian.

The Spanish-Renaissance building was designed by noted Boston architect Ralph Adams Cram, who worked with local architects William Ward Watkin and Louis Glover on the project.

"We have the original plans from the '20s," says Phoebe Tudor, chairman of the Julia Ideson Library Preservation Partners. "Our architects have been able to study, in detail, the wing that was planned at that time."

Barry Moore with the Gensler architecture firm is lead designer on the addition, which will be accompanied by a new south loggia and outdoor reading room.

Tudor says Moore didn't follow the



RENDERING COURTESY OF GENSLER

A rendering of the new archival wing of the Julia Ideson Building (above) includes a new outdoor reading room and south loggia.



original plans to a "T" because national rules regarding historic structures require new construction to look different enough from the existing building to make an obvious distinction between the two.

The Julia Ideson Building served as Houston's main library for 50 years. It

is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark, City of Houston Protected Landmark, Texas State Archaeological Landmark and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The Ideson's Houston Metropolitan Research Center will move into the new 24,500-square-foot wing when it is finished at the end of the year. The research center contains 4 million photographic images of Houston life dating back to the mid-1800s; 7,000 rare children's books; and more than 300 maps, including the

first map of Houston.

The Julia Ideson Library Preservation Partners has raised more than \$21 million of the \$38 million needed for the project.

Tudor says previous donations were raised before the economic downturn. With the new construction under way, the group will now focus on raising funds for the restoration phase of the project.

"We're going to be optimistic and plow ahead," says Tudor. "We're not going to give up."