The University of Oregon Library Building
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One of the features of the University of Oregon’s homecoming program this year was the dedication, on the morning of October 23, of the new Library building. The exercises were held in the Browsing Room, the main address being given by Mr. John Henry Nash, the well-known San Francisco printer, on the subject, “The Library, the Heart of a College.”

Dedication day also marked the opening of the recently acquired Burgess Collection in a conference room which had been furnished with wall shelves for displaying it. This collection of rare books and manuscripts is from the library of the late Dr. Edward Sandford Burgess, for many years Professor of Biology in Hunter College in New York, N.Y. Its acquisition by the University of Oregon was made possible by the generosity of Dr. Burgess’s sister, Miss Julia Burgess, Professor of English here, and by the contributions of other friends of the University. The Collection numbers about 1,000 volumes and includes fifteen Latin manuscripts, several Near East manuscripts, thirty-eight incunabula and numerous rare books from the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The nineteenth century portion of the collection was the gift from the University’s Vice-president, Mr. Burt Brown Barker and Mrs. Barker. This part includes rare editions and items with association interest of Shelleyana, Byroniana, Browningiana, and Stevensoniana, other American and English writers, and interesting and unusual books of travel.

On display also during dedication week were the original one thousand dollars’ worth of book (about 325 volumes) given to the University in 1882 by Mr. Henry Villard, as the beginning of the University of Oregon Library. The University opened its doors in 1876 and previous to 1882 did not have an official library, although the literary societies did have a collection of books.

In 1881 Mr. Villard, after having investigated the needs of the University, wrote to the Board of Regents: “I will give $1,000 for the foundation of a library for the University. I will personally undertake to have the most suitable works of reference selected by competent experts.” Mr. Villard also gave the University $50,000 in Northern Pacific bonds for endowment. One condition of the gift was that at least $400 a year of the income should be used for the purchase of books for the Library.

University administrators are given to speaking of the library as the heart of the institution and yet on most campuses the adequate library building is very slow in arriving. One reason is that it requires a relatively large and expensive building to house safely and properly a library’s collection of books, documents, newspapers, pamphlets, manuscripts, and more especially, to make proper provisions for hundreds of patrons with their varied requirements, as they make use of the different types of library material.
For some institutions generous private benefactors have provided magnificent buildings. Other institutions are not so fortunate and have to secure their library building funds from other sources, generally a very slow process. To a number of such institutions, including the University of Oregon, the Public Works Administration made possible the realization of long awaited hopes and ambitions.

Plans at the University of Oregon for a new Library building were made as far back as 1911, when the legislature made an appropriation of $175,000 for a fireproof Library and museum. This measure was defeated by referendum vote. Again after the millage measure of 1920 was passed bringing promise of some balance for building purposes, there was much discussion, not to say controversy, as to whether it should be spent on a library or a science building. When it developed that only about $100,000 would be available, realizing that this sum would not be enough for even the first unit of a library, a compromise was agreed upon, by which Condon hall, a science building, was built, one floor of which was made available for use as a Reserve Library.

In 1926, with the coming of Dr. Arnold Bennett Hall to the presidency of the University, active plans were once more made for a Library building. In 1927, the legislature appropriated $375,000 for such a building. This appropriation was vetoed by the Governor. In spite of disappointment, hopes and plans were continued and finally PWA came into existence. On May 16, 1935, the Library Committee of the Faculty recommended to the Chancellor and to the Board of Higher Education that application be made for a PWA allotment of $525,000. The University was then without a president and the former independent board of Higher Education, not too familiar with the workings and needs of a modern university library, but very conscious of depression financial problems. The decision was to apply for $325,000 only. Fortunately, when bids were opened and it was discovered how inadequate the sum was, a supplementary allotment of $98,000 was applied for and received. Of the $448,000 PWA money, 30 percent was grant and 70 percent loan. In addition to government money, the University Alumni Holding Company provided $15,000, making a total of $463,000 available for the building, exclusive of furnishings and WPA art contributions. The Federal loan, with interest, is being repaid by a student billing fee of $5 per term per student, no part of construction costs being charged to state tax funds.

On November 11, 1933, the official application for the $350,000 was sent in; on June 16, 1935, word was received that the application had been approved; on September 16, 1935, ground breaking exercises were held and on May 4, 1937, the building was first opened to the public.

After analyzing the library needs of the University of Oregon, and studying over a term of years practices and trends in university library building, the library staff and the faculty library committee arrived at several conclusions and convictions:

1. That the library building should be centrally located on site that would make possible generous future expansion.
2. That the building, itself, should be planned for such expansion.
3. That the library building, although attractive, should be planned as a place essentially for service rather than display.
4. That for the University of Oregon it would be feasible and desirable to follow to follow the example of those institutions which had substituted for the monumental, traditional omnibus reading room, smaller specialized reading rooms, especially planned for their specific use.

5. That the circulation department, and consequently other departments making large use of the card catalog, should be on the ground floor so that patrons borrowing and returning books would not have to unnecessary steps to go up and down.

6. That facilities for recreational reading should be emphasized, preferably in space conveniently located to the circulation department.

The above are a few of the considerations the architects were asked to have in mind in drawing their plans.

The site was selected under the leadership of President Arnold Bennett hall and this selection later confirmed by the Board of Higher Education after funds for the building were again in prospect. This location places the Library facing north at the head of a new quadrangle to include five buildings, the first units of three of these are already in use. According to present plans, a humanities classroom building is likely to be the fourth of the group. Space to the rear of the new building is adequate for generous extension and the new building has been planned with such extensions in mind. The architects give assurance that before all possibilities of expansion are exhausted it will be possible to have a building that can accommodate 5,000 readers at a time.

The relatively modest building fund together with a conviction that university libraries are primarily for use rather than display precluded the possibility of a monumental type of building. However, those planning and designing the building did recognize their obligation to provide in it attractive surroundings. That they succeeded well is testimony of those who have visited and used the Library.

The Library was fortunate in having as its architects Lawrence, Holford and Allyn of Portland. The senior member of the firm, Ellis F. Lawrence, is dean of the University of Oregon School of Architecture and Allied Arts. He was sympathetic to the points of view of the library staff and patient in his efforts to meet their requirements in the best possible way. He reports that his firm made as many as twenty-five sets of plans before the satisfactory one was worked out. He enlisted the interest and services of the members of the staff of his School and also of present and former art students who in various ways contributed much to the effectiveness and attractiveness of the building.

The building is of reinforced concrete faced with Willamina (Oregon) red brick and trimmed with cast stone to conform with other buildings on the Campus. It has a frontage of 248 feet and a total depth, including the stack room portion, of 146 feet. Over the seven tall windows of the open shelf reserve reading room are inscribed the words: “Philosophia, Historia, Religio, Ars, Natura, Societas, Litterae.” Along the cornice above are set portrait heads in cast stone of fifteen outstanding representatives of various fields of human culture: St. Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, John Locke, Thucydides, Buddha, Christ, Michelangelo, Beethoven, Leonardo da
Vinci, Sir Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Thomas Jefferson, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Shakespeare, and Dante. The heads were done by graduates of the University, the late Miss Edna Dunberg, and Mrs. Louise Utter Pritchard.

Instead of a single grand main entrance, there are two entrance vestibules on the front, not large but rich with their bronze entrance doors, their walls of Napoleon gray French marble, their columns of black and gold Italian marble, and their gilt ceilings. The use of two front entrances, in addition to a basement entrance on the west, results in a distribution of the traffic with less congestion and confusion at any point than frequently is found in public buildings.

Inside, the walls of the main corridor, the circulation lobby and the stairways up to the second floor and down to the basement are of warm Keota stone, quarried in Minnesota. In planning the building, one of the decisions early reached was that, for the convenience of the public, the Circulation Department should be on the first floor. It is, of course, essential that the card catalog be convenient to the Circulation and Reference Departments and, if a duplicate catalog is to be avoided, to the Order and Catalog Departments as well. Also it is highly desirable to have suitable accommodations downstairs for the largest single group of library patrons – those using reserve books. First floor requirements were so great that it was the problem of the architects to provide the requisite ground floor space and still have a building that would keep within the available funds. The problem was solved by designing the building with two one-story wings, which can later be continued up to three stories. In the east wing are accommodations for the general reserves, including reserve stacks with capacity for 15,000 volumes; one study room, 33 x 96 feet in size, furnished with 157 individual study desks; an overflow Reading Room, 20 x 40 feet, to be equipped with too tablet arm chairs so that it may on occasions serve as a lecture room; a small conference room where students may work together, this room being furnished with wall cases containing the Edward Sandford Burgess Collection previously described. The west wing houses the Reference and Periodical Departments and Periodical Reading Room is 33 x 63 feet, each of these two department has a small private office making possible the holding of conferences and the use of telephone and typewriter without disturbing readers. Behind the reference desk are stacks for shelving back numbers of recent periodicals not yet bound; there is a mezzanine above for incomplete volumes and stack space below to take care of bound periodical desk. In the main portion of the building on the first floor at the front between the corridor and the lobby are three pairs if wrought iron gates, a WPA are project made memorial to ex-president Arnold Bennett Hall. On the wall are two tablets with the following inscriptions:

1. These gates wrought in loving craftsmanship and beauty, commemorate the devoted service of Dr. Arnold Bennett Hall, fifth president of the University, 1926-1932.
2. From Dr. Hall’s inaugural address: “Respect for the homely virtues, a genius and noble sense of chivalry and a reverence for the things that are holy: these should be nourished and cultivated until they become the established traditions of the campus, for only out of such environment can come the noblest and best character and ideals.”

The gates were done by unemployed metal workers of Portland under the direction of Mr. O. B. Dawson, designer and master craftsman, a former University of Oregon Student.
To the West of the circulation lobby is an alcove containing the card catalog, easily accessible to the Circulation, Cataloging, Order and Reference Departments and the librarian’s office. The reference Department maintains in the circulation lobby an information desk to assist patrons in the use of the card catalog. In the north and east partitions of the circulation lobby are built-in display of Oregon. This collection containing 350 paintings by Mrs. Caroline K. Sweetser, wife of professor Emeritus of Botany A. R. Sweetser, has been deposited in the library. The Bibliography Room, 11 x 36 feet containing trade bibliography and other books much used by Order Department and catalogers is easily accessible also to Circulation and Reference Departments, and to the librarian’s office as well. The Cataloging Room, 20 ½ x 40 feet, has direct access to the order Department, to the Bibliography Room and to the stacks; the Order Department, 20 ½ x 30 feet, is located between the Cataloging Room and the librarian’s office and has a door also into the Bibliography Room.

On the walls of each of the two stairways leading to the second floor is a mural panel – west one illustrating the evolution of the sciences, the cast one the evolution of the arts. These are the work of two brothers, Arthur and Albert Runquist, both graduates of the University. On the wall opposite the west mural is an illuminated inscription entitled “The Mission of a University.” It is a quotation from the writings of the late Frederick G. Young, who served the University with much distinction as professor of Social Sciences and Dean of Sociology from 1895 to 1928. The corresponding inscription on the west side entitled “Opportunity for the Youth of Oregon,” is from the pen of Luella Clay Carson who, as Professor of Rhetoric and Dean of Woman from 1868 to 1909, made a deep impression on the life of the community. Dr. Carson left the University in 1909 to become president of Mills College. The lettering of these quotations was done by Professor N. B. Zane of Art Department.

The second floor provides facilities for open shelf reserves for advanced courses and for the following special collections: Oregon, Rare Books, League of Nations, University of Oregon, and Maps. The open shelf reserve facilities include: (1) a book room with a capacity of 13,000 volumes with entrance and exit through turnstiles, the books being arranged according to departments and courses, enabling the students to examine, charge, and take them across the corridor to (2) the Open Shelf Reserve Reading Room, frequently called the Upper Division Reading Room. It is a room 90 x 24 feet in size, with ceiling 22 feet high. Interesting features of the room are two wood carvings – one at each end of the room depicting scenery, history, resources, industries, art project, the work of Mr. Art Clough and associates of Eugene.

The third floor contains a class room for library courses, a seminar, sixteen faculties “cells” for professors engaged in writing or research projects, and a room later to be developed as a Graduate Room.

The basement includes a Newspapers Reading Room, 30 x 50 feet, to be used also by students studying their own books, a Newspaper Stack Room, housing the Library’s collection of 5,000 newspapers, stacks of classified bound periodicals of general interest, storage space for duplicates, Staff Rooms, Mending Room, Photography Room, two vaults including one for microfilms and three studies for blind students and their readers.
The stack wing at the rear will accommodate about 325,000 volumes on seven levels parts of the building bring the total book capacity of the building up towards 400,000 volumes. The stacks were built by the Art Metal Company and the Stack Room is equipped with an automatic Otis Elevator, a Snead-Book conveyor, and a pneumatic-tube communication system. It contains ninety study stalls for the use of faculty members and graduate students.

A good deal of local publicity has been given to the Browsing Room, it differs from most other browsing rooms in that it occupies the most conspicuous place in the building – the front central portion of the first floor. It was and is the conviction of those planning the Browsing Room that, probably, the most important single element sin the success of the project is the librarian in charge and the service she can render in interesting, counseling, and inspiring students. Consequently, great care was taken in her selection. The choice was Miss Ethel R. Sawyer, formerly for many years’ director of the training school of the Portland Library Association. The Room is 90 x 24 feet in size, has a fireplace in each end, it is being made a memorial to the late Mrs. Adelaide Church, prominent citizen of Eugene and good friend of the University. The Room houses, besides miscellaneous books of general interest, most of art works, etc. here are shelved the traveling house collection especially chosen for use in the forty fraternities, sororities, and halls of residence. Here the house librarians come to make their selections with the assistance of the Browsing Room Librarian. Here, too, the house librarians matter of common interest, and to consider means of increasing the resources of the house libraries and the Browsing Room. The Browsing Room was deliberately that the best results will be obtained from close cooperation between the Browsing Room librarian and the circulation librarian and her staff.

The University of Oregon has a student body of about 3,500; a book collection of 285,000 volumes, including the Law Library shelved in the law building; a home circulation from the circulation desk of 104,555; a total recorded circulation including reserves of 559,378. Although some ampler spaces could be desired to provide for future expansion, the building is providing to be very convenient and attractive and it apparently will, when fully furnished, meet present needs adequately. Altogether, the feeling is that the University received a good deal for the money invested; much pride and satisfaction is being taken in it.

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