

# Hall Bears Name of UO Benefactor

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of articles on the lives of the men and women for whom University of Oregon buildings are named. The series is designed to honor the memories of people who have aided the University financially and through their educational ability.

By JOE MEIER

Henry Hilgaard Villard, whose spirit is perpetuated by the school building bearing his name, is probably the most renowned University of Oregon benefactor. His character was dynamic, his career colossal, his reputation mythical.

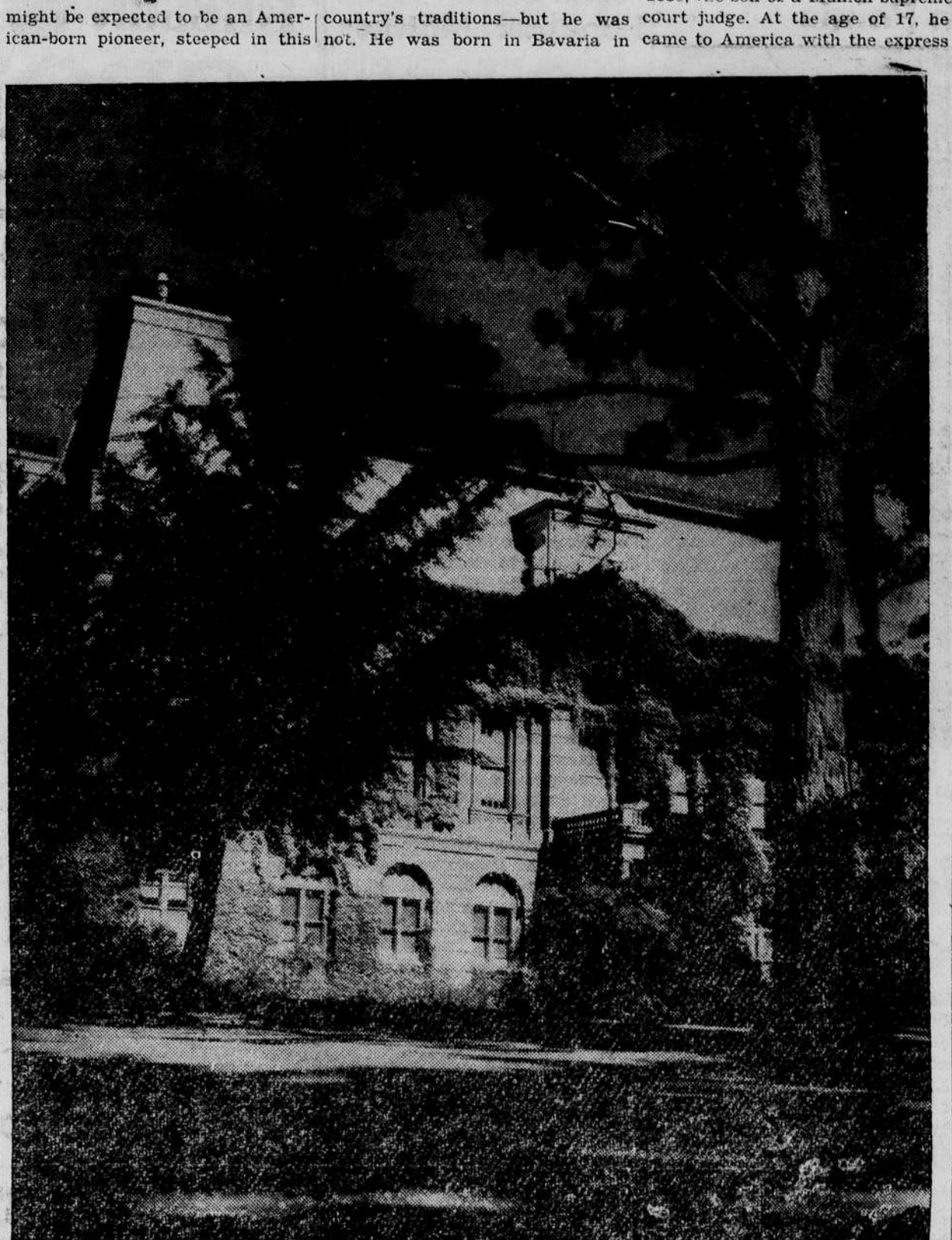
A man of many accomplishments—journalist, editor, teacher, banker, and railroad financier—Villard will always be remembered for his role in the historical development of Oregon.

It was Villard, who, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, cut a network of rail transportation through the Oregon wilderness, uniting the state and speeding its growth. It was Villard who, as president of the Northern Pacific railroad, fostered construction of the first transcontinental railroad to Oregon, increasing with a rush the settlement of this state.

### Swung Sledge-Hammer

All school children remember from their history books the wild celebration during which a golden spike was driven at Gold Springs, Montana, completing construction of the 2,000 mile railway. Most of them do not remember that Henry Villard was the man who swung the sledge-hammer that day.

Villard fell in love with Oregon's scenic beauty at first sight and write friends enthusiastically about it. His dream was to see this region grow into a great economic empire, and no man did more toward this end. Through an extensive advertising campaign, he attracted thousands of immigrant settlers and made Oregon the most publicized of all the United States. Considering this record, Villard



might be expected to be an American-born pioneer, steeped in this country's traditions—but he was not. He was born in Bavaria in 1835, the son of a Munich supreme court judge. At the age of 17, he came to America with the express

intention of making a name and a fortune for himself.

He dropped his family name, Hilgaard, and borrowed "Villard" from a French schoolmate. Living on the Illinois farm of relatives, Villard attended law school at Carlyle university and concurrently wrote for the German-American press. Later, he abandoned law and tried his hand at editing a country paper.

As a war correspondent during the Civil War, Villard gained considerable fame and at the close of the war was sent to France as a foreign correspondent. In 1868, on his return from Europe, he was elected secretary of the American social science association, in which capacity he worked tirelessly for civil service reform.

### Railroad Man

Eventually he learned of Oregon railroad conditions through friends who held stock in the rustic Oregon & California Railroad company. He was interested, came to Oregon, stayed. In a few years he was president of Northern Pacific Railroad company and owner of most of Oregon's transportation system. For a time, due to his gigantic operations, Villard was considered the leading figure in American railroads.

Villard's attention was drawn to Oregon in 1881 when news of the impending sale of the University's only building, Deady hall, appeared in Portland newspapers. Always a man of keen intellectual interests, he believed in developing the educational as well as economic resources of the Northwest.

Consequently he assumed the threatening \$7,000 debt. Besides making numerous other contributions, he presented the University with \$50,000 in Northern Pacific bonds from which a \$3,000 annual income was derived. With this endowment the University's days of financial insecurity were ended.

Villard's generosity attracted wide attention, since his donations were the first of any importance to public higher education in Oregon. The



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