

Surface and Symbol

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Rich in words, not profit

Browsing in Eugene's bookstores

By Cheryl Rudert

It seems to go hand in hand — a love for books and a recurring, secret dream to open a bookstore.

For many it remains exactly that — an impulsive fancy in the back of their minds. For others it becomes a reality.

In Eugene, the number of pragmatic dreamers is increasing rapidly. Ten years ago one could count the number of bookstores on a single hand; today there are 24, many of which have opened in the past two years.

In spite of the "easy life" that running a bookstore may appear to be, there are many barriers to its success. Not only is competition keen, but the owner must cope with rising publisher costs and inefficiency, increasing freight rates and a business tax that diverts the sales tax burden from consumers to the small shop owner.

Eugene is far from the ideal place to run any small business, let alone another book-

mingling of the rare Oregon sun and book-browsing.

This same idea is being employed by Paul Barnhart, owner of Merlin's (825 E. 13th). Behind the store and beyond the din of 13th Avenue traffic is a meditative reading garden just opened.

Barnhart feels that the garden, which is a cozy retreat furnished with stone benches and flourishing plants, fits in with the goal of the store — "to encourage people to read."

Merlin's opened in December after an expansive remodeling that transformed a laundry storage space into an artistic melange of wooden cross-beamed ceilings and brick floors based on the design of Michelangelo's Florentine library.

Open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. Saturday, the store offers mostly well-illustrated hard-back books in four basic areas — cooking, gardening and plants, art and artists, and woodworking. A fifth specialty, architecture, is soon to be added.

faculty and students ever since.

When Robbins decided to move his store from his former 13th Ave. location (where Sugar Pine Ridge is presently), a group of 100 University students persuaded the City Council to permit the store to be located at 1340 Alder Street. University architecture students also designed the store.

Robbins, a former University student himself, says proudly, "Our store has kept in business this long only through the students and professors we serve."

The store was the first to offer students a direct cash discount of 10 per cent on textbooks. Many other stores, including the University Bookstore, have followed suit.

Open 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and 11 a.m. - 5 p.m. Saturday the store is a store packed with quality paperbacks on every subject imaginable. Combined with a room full of posters, art prints and imported bedspreads plus a large selection of records, the store exists as a kind of intellectual's supermarket.

The Son of Koobdooga bookstore also has an involved history. Started by a political activist during the late Sixties, the store stocked books and subjects listed in the Whole Earth Catalogue, with the intent of making the community more aware of political happenings.

Due to financial problems the store closed and switched ownership, re-opening in 1972 through Fred Austin.

Austin, and later partner Max Baker, were both interns in the University's education department before they decided to accept the challenge of running a retail business.

They have remodeled the store and expanded its contents and scope "to the point of stocking books in all fields," says Baker. "A bookstore reflects the owners' interests and we feel that we should be an integral part of the community by supporting other endeavors."

In action this means that the store, located at 651 E. 13th, carries cards and prints by local artists, a large supply of local magazines and gives a 10 per cent discount on books to be used by a public service.

Open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 2-10 p.m. on Sunday, the store offers a relaxed atmosphere for browsing.

Further removed from the campus, at 101 W. 7th, the Second Hand Book Man is another rest-home for used books.

Opened in 1973, the store formerly carried only used books until it switched ownership last June.

Linda Ellis and Jeremy Nissel, former students from Berkeley, decided to leave "the hopelessly tedious and unpleasant life in Berkeley" and try their luck running their own bookstore in a more appealing Eugene.

They have expanded the store's former contents with an amazing collection of cards, a table full of remainders (hard-back art books selling at half-price due to publishers' over-stock) and a few shelves of current books.

Reputedly offering a better price for used books than other stores, they are, however, more selective and will not buy used textbooks or books which have been underlined.

The Second Hand Book Man is open 10 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

Ellis and Nissel are excited about the store's growth and "the comfortable feeling provided for people." Well organized by subject, the store also offers a selection of rare books.

An atmosphere of hushed, creative potential greets one upon entering Mother Kali's, at 333 E. 11th. Opened last fall, the bookstore is run by a collective of four women — Barbara, Devi, E, and Muffin — and serves as a center for women's groups when not functioning in its primary role as a bookstore.

A wide range of books is offered, all basically women-oriented, as well as a new line of records by women artists, local crafts sold on consignment, art prints, women's magazines and local poetry anthologies.

When Mother Kali's (Kali, by the way, is an Indian goddess representing the totality of the universe, embracing at once creation, preservation, and destruction) is not a bookstore, it serves as a place for poetry readings, group meetings, and art shows.

"The store," says Barbara, "provides valuable spaces for people who don't have valuable spaces."

Open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday, the store is an essential part of the women's community. Also featured is a playroom for children and large bulletin board to encourage the unity of the women's community.

The Book Fair at 1409 Oak, opened 10 years ago, making it the oldest used bookstore in Eugene.

Owned by Jerry Leedy, a former librarian from California, the store offers a challenge to book browsers. Organization is there, all right, if one is willing to look for it.

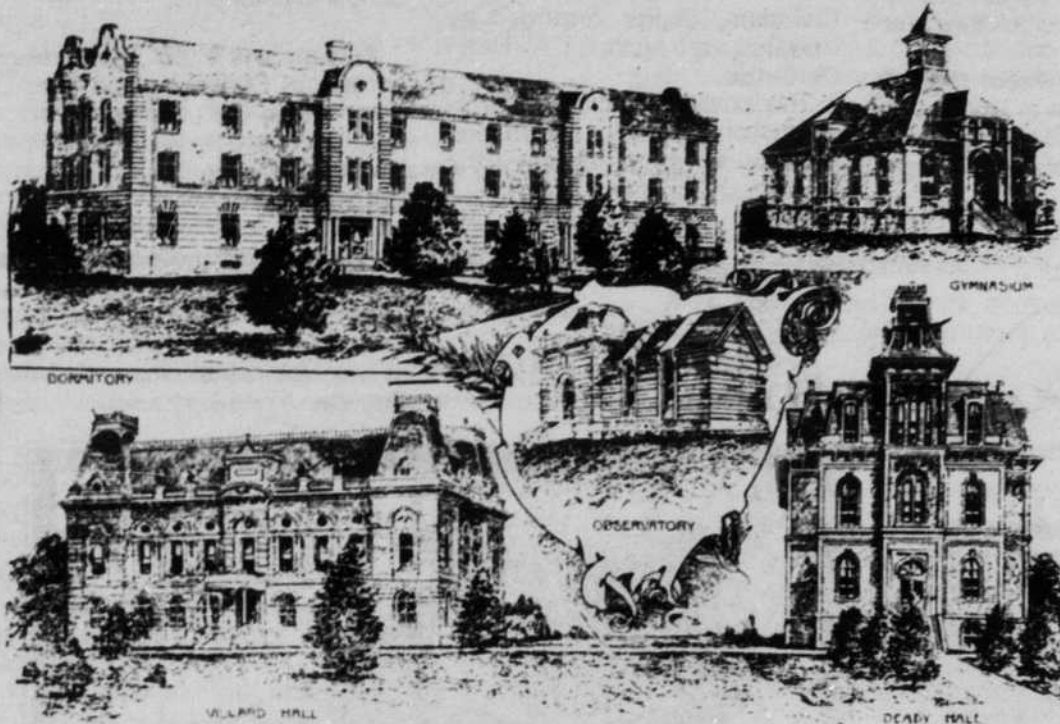
Leedy stocks 90 per cent used books in all areas and buys the rest new, because they are current books that are hard to get second hand.

Texts are bought, preferably at the end of the term, as well as regular trade books. The store's hours are 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday with an evening stint of 6:30 - 9 p.m. on Saturdays.

Leedy discourages more bookstores opening in the area.

"The used bookstore scene is relatively healthy," he contends, "but not for long if it keeps expanding."

Yet Eugene is a magnetic city, ever-expanding, whose assets are being recognized elsewhere. It is a city with a reading public and, inevitably, more people will arrive with that same indefinite notion floating somewhere in their day-dreams — to get out from under someone else's thumb and open a bookstore.



Fort's book, "Early Days at the University of Oregon," reflects University days when buildings like these were new.

store. Yet some force of human spirit is meeting that challenge and succeeding.

And it is not for money.

Bookstore owners will only laugh if you ask them if the business is lucrative.

In talking with the small private bookstore owners in the campus area, one finds in every case a desire to be independent from the boring routine of a more secure job coupled with a concern for how bookstores fit into the community. Each store owner feels that his or her shop is fulfilling a role beneficial to student and non-student readers, as well as satisfying personal interests.

Mary Faust and Patricia Tubb opened their Book and Tea store four and a half years ago as a meeting place for women's groups.

Mary says "when we opened there was a need for a place for people to get out of their homes and interact. Luckily I was able to blend working for people with what I like — reading."

The Book and Tea shop, located at 1646 E. 19th Ave., is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Saturday, 10 a.m. - 6 p.m. and Sunday 1 - 8 p.m.

Offering a wide selection of children's books and books hard to find elsewhere (special orders are welcomed), the shop provides a setting conducive to reading. Chairs and cushions are conveniently placed amongst the shop's small rooms, fully lined with books of every description. Also available is an abundant selection of cards, small prints and, naturally, tea.

To further integrate with the community Faust and Tubb are building a sun deck on the front of the store, which will allow a

A set of show-cases is being constructed in the back room to display the works of local craftsmen and artists. The store is fast becoming a haven, as soft classical music greets one upon entering and books beautiful to behold invite one to explore.

Around the corner, at 1233 Alder, the Smith Family Bookstore stocks mostly used books.

Misa Smith and her husband Del, co-owners, were students at the University 20 years ago when they took over a used bookstore in the same area.

The store closed within a few years and the Smiths then went into the garbage trade, "until," says Mrs. Smith, "we decided to go back into the used-book business two years ago. We felt that students needed a store near campus where they could sell their books."

The Smith Family Bookstore, open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, buys used textbooks as well as general trade books, according to demand. In return the store offers an extensive and well-organized selection of books, 10 per cent of which are new.

Unique among bookstore features is the free book box at the front of the store (yes! some things in life still are free) which contains books unwanted by students and the store.

The Id Book and Record Store's owner, Ken Robbins, felt that students and professors needed an alternative to the University Bookstore when he opened ten years ago.

Coming from a life-long experience in retail trade, Robbins decided to blend his interests in books and records with this need and has worked closely with the University

Inside

Women Poets of Eugene, p. 4b, in which Sally Sheklow, a "struggling senior" majoring in broadcasting, writes about a recently formed group of poets with a special interest in feminism.

Another Flight of the Cuckoo, p. 7b in which Bob Webb, one-half of the S & S editorial team talks about the local stage version of an enduring Kesey play.

Fleeting Visions and Brief Asides, pp. 2b-3b, in which events and activities on campus and around Eugene—some fleeting, some not so brief—are recounted in hopefully accurate detail.

The Great Coffee Rush, p. 5b, in which Glen Gibbons, S & S co-editor and novice coffee-drinker kneels before a giant replica of a Java bean — and a review by Candace Dempsey of unpublished Ken Kesey manuscripts on display at a new coffeehouse opening up just off-campus.

Coming Next Week in S & S: The Eugene Tavern Music Scene, relentlessly pursued by Greg Raschio and Bill Benson.

Tom Robbins: Back in the Saddle — notes on a semi-underground hero and a review of his latest novel.