

Library endures century of service

Early books had trouble finding the right shelves

By **DEBBIE HOWLETT**
Of the Emerald

The University library is celebrating its centennial year. This is the first of a three part series that will dust off the cobwebs and wander the halls of the archives.

A year after the University opened its doors in 1876, a collection of books belonging to the Eugene Library Association was purchased and moved to campus. The several hundred volumes, costing \$250, became a functioning library.

The first "real" library came in 1881 as a result of a \$1,000 grant from a wealthy railroad magnate named Henry Villard, who chose the books personally. The books were housed in a math and astronomy professor's classroom on the first floor of Deady Hall.

From these inauspicious beginnings came the library that now serves the campus and community with over 1.5 million volumes and an accumulated worth of \$19.5 million. The library now boasts more than 800,000 separate titles.

The first space allocated for a library was a small corner room in the basement of Villard Hall. The library was then shuffled from Villard to Deady to Collier Hall — now the faculty club. In

1900 it was moved to the basement of a men's dormitory, then called Friendly Hall, where it stayed until the first library building was built.

That structure was ready in 1908. The bottom floor was used as a library and the top two floors were classrooms. The library was housed here until 1937, when the present library was finished.

Increasing enrollment after World War I put a heavy strain on the old building and the library was de-centralized so that the architecture and allied arts library and the law library were housed in separate buildings, as they are today.

W.D. Fenton donated 9,000 books valued at \$50,000 in 1921. Fenton later donated a large number of volumes for the law library.

There were additions to the building over the years but the student population and the number of books grew faster than the building.

In 1927 the first rumblings for a newer library were heard. Pres. Arnold Hall, in a letter to the board of regents, said, "The Library, which has size and space for a student body less than half our size, although spread out in different parts of three buildings...is hopelessly inadequate."

Despite the strong language,

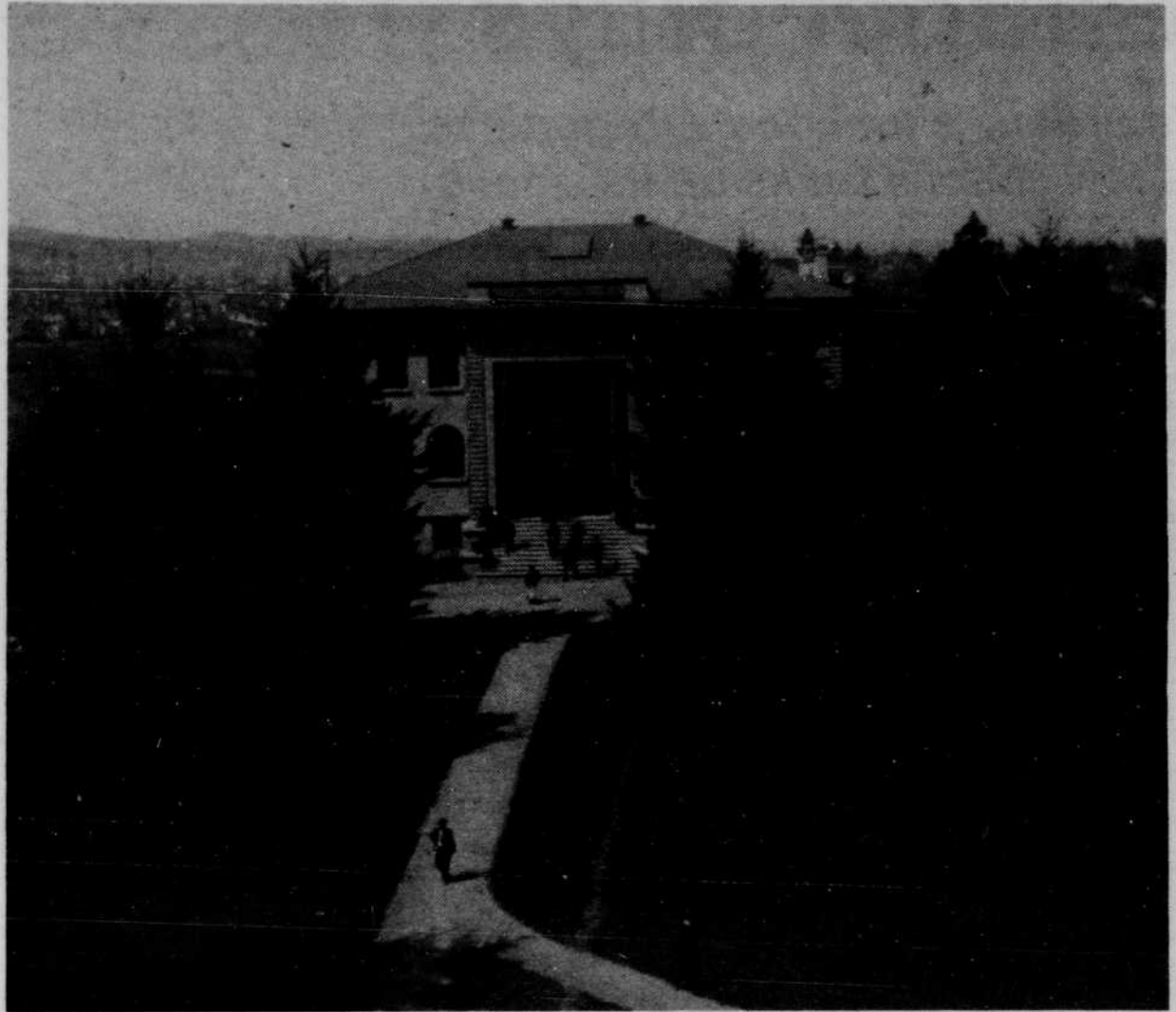


Photo courtesy of the University Library Archives

In 1906, Fenton Hall housed the growing University library. It remained there until 1937, when the present structure was completed.

construction on the proposed \$450,000 building did not begin until September, 1935.

It was at this time that the first report of bookworms leaked out. These were of the bug var-

ity — not over-zealous students. The bugs preferred eating volumes to reading them but actually did little damage to the 193,000 volumes.

It was also during this period

that money from library grant funds financed the building of a new arena. The arena was officially called McArthur Court but soon developed the nickname, the "igloo."

Philanthropists not supporting library, says prof

If pioneer philanthropist Henry Villard could visit the University today he would probably be proud of its library with its impressive collections and the support of the faculty and students.

However, according to professor Harold Maxwell Brown, Villard would notice one crucial element missing from the library — a generous benefactor such as himself.

Brown, a Pacific historian, says the University's library hasn't seen any philanthropists such as Henry Villard recently.

"What have the Weyerhausers, the

Newhouses and other wealthy Oregonians done for the support of the University? The answer is very little," Brown said Monday evening as he lectured on "Henry Villard and the University Library" in Gerlinger Lounge.

The lecture was jointly sponsored by the Friends of the Library and the University's Centennial Project Committee as part of the year-long observance of the library's centennial year.

As a former Bavarian emigrant arriving nearly penniless in America and speaking no English, Villard found his way to the American dream and an eventual

railroad empire the hard way, says Brown.

Villard, best known as the builder of the first railroad joining the Pacific Northwest with the rest of the country, believed the American educational system played a crucial role in his success. This belief would later contribute to a deep-seated commitment to the support of the University library.

Although Villard donated heavily to several Northwest educational institutions, the University of Oregon, and its library in particular, was the focus of Villard's generosity.

According to Brown, Villard contributed a gift to the library that would amount to about \$500,000 in 1981 dollars.

The first load of Villard's gift of books arrived at the University via Wells-Fargo stagecoach in the spring of 1882. The arriving crates contained an impressive 352 volumes of world classics in every educational discipline. The volumes were personally selected and accompanied by Villard himself.

The Villard family's philanthropy was continued by his widow and later by his son.

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