

Education among the ruins

Buildings bear brunt of budget cuts

By Ann Portal
Of the Emerald

Those ivy-covered buildings and mossy window sills aren't there for effect. They're the product of neglect — the most visible evidence of declining dollars for higher education.

The University and the other state higher education institutions have starved physical plant budgets for the past 10 years, as they try to hold on to programs, faculty and services. Their campuses show it.

University buildings, tunnels and grounds have reached the breaking point, says Harold Babcock, physical plant director. And he says he doesn't foresee the Legislature providing extra maintenance funds in the near future.

The campus's beautiful grounds and old buildings may look nice, but part of their appeal — their aging appearance — is the result of 30 to 50 years of deterioration, Babcock says.

ONLY EMERGENCY MAINTENANCE is taken care of, he says, and routine "preventative" maintenance has had to wait. That maintenance has waited too long. Now the University must consider replacing — rather than repairing — large parts of the campus. And soon.

"We're there now — but how do we convince people we're there now?" Babcock asks.

Curt Simic, vice president for University relations, says that of the five or six schools he's worked at, the condition of the University is the worst he's seen.

"We've got two years to make or break," Simic predicts. To illustrate the effect of not having an adequate maintenance program, he points to the window sills at Susan Campbell Hall, where his office is located. Physical plant workers had to replace the sills

this year because the University couldn't afford to paint them during earlier years.

The University's physical plant has a \$4 million budget this year, but most of the money is tied up in wages, Babcock says. The University gives him a lump sum each year for running the plant, and he divides the money among different areas.

For the last 10 years, that money hasn't gone far enough to pay for much preventative maintenance, thus each emergency puts the budget in the hole, he says.

"It seems to me that we just haven't had enough monies to have a good basic maintenance program," he says. "It's been stacking up as long as I've been here."

He says the physical plant crew concentrates on emergency maintenance to keep "the disasters" from happening. Safety valves are flushed, cracked pipes — when discovered — are replaced. But some classrooms haven't been painted for more than 20 years, he says.

THE IMPACT OF MAINTENANCE PROBLEMS are more than cosmetic. Physical education classes in Gerlinger are restricted to those that don't include jumping. The floor can't take jumping, Babcock says.

At McArthur Court, the old floor used to be sanded when it got too rough, but the wood can't take another sanding, Babcock says. The floor "looks good and works all right," thanks to frequent buffings and finishings, he says.

Two of Babcock's top priorities are areas noticed least by the public: replacing roofs and checking pipes. Most money wrung out of the physical plant budget last year (Babcock can choose where to spend savings at the fiscal year's end) went toward rebuilding and coating roofs.

The physical plant "cuts corners all the time" to try



Dilapidated exterior wood shingles at Gerlinger Hall

and get those extra funds, Babcock says.

Even with a lot of scrimping, people and weather can throw a wrench in the physical plant's budget. Someone went 4-wheeling on an athletic field during this winter's snowstorm, and reseeding must come out of the physical plant's budget. Expensive sand-blasting to remove graffiti also eats up the budget, Babcock says.

The Legislature does offer some assistance to higher education institutions in an amount given annually to the State Board of Higher Education for "physical plant rehabilitation."

That fund, which pays for emergency maintenance and minor building projects, is portioned among the eight colleges and universities. The account hit a high of \$713,107 during the 1980-81 academic year but dipped to a meager \$76,278 this year, according to Jack Hunderup, vice chancellor for facilities planning.

EASTERN OREGON STATE COLLEGE already used \$34,000 on boiler problems, leaving \$42,000 for emergencies at any of the eight institutions during the remainder of the academic year, Hunderup says.

He says he's had to turn down numerous requests so far this year, though none from the University. "They know that there are no resources available," so they don't bother asking he says.

Hunderup says institutions may be reaching the point where money must be diverted from academic areas to maintenance.

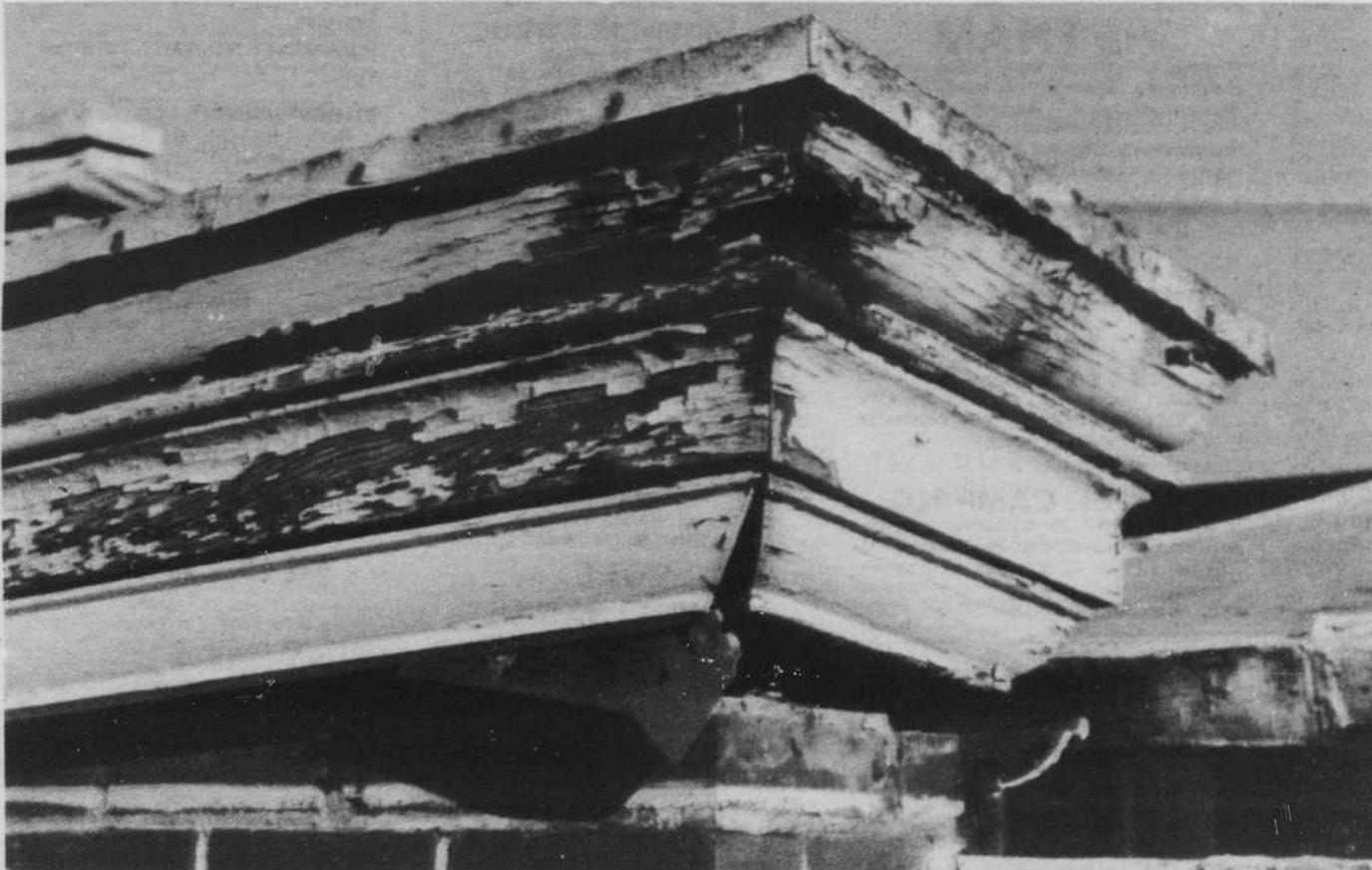
"Clearly, the institutions will have to spend some money for maintenance and repair or they will have to close some buildings," he says.

Ray Hawk, vice president for administration and finance, says the University administration has always talked about retaining faculty, programs and research — at the expense of the physical plant.

"When push comes to shove, the presidents would always cut the physical plant," he says. But there is a law of diminishing returns, and it is no longer prudent to cut maintenance dollars, Hawk says.

Babcock says the University administration is "as fair as they can be." But he knows the pipes continue to deteriorate and roof tiles continue to warp.

"All we can do is keep pointing out the dangers and the problems we are having," he says.



Deteriorated moldings at Gerlinger Hall, including movement of brick cap

Photos courtesy of the University Physical Plant

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