

Gifts from bygone years

Presentations withstand test of time

On an old oak tree near Villard Hall, a tarnished plaque is one of the only hints to today's University students that the University had a class of 1900.

The tree is one of two oaks commemorated by the Class of 1900 that has stood observing campus life since the birth of the University in 1876.

Now in a little-traveled part of campus, aged by the elements and half-overgrown by the tree, the plaque testifies to the end of a period when graduating classes left their mark on campus by planting a tree.

Some classes have added a sense of humor as well as practicality with their gifts. After seeing two trees from a previous class wither and die, the smart seniors of 1893 got a 4½-foot rectangular block of basalt from nearby Skinner Butte, planted it by the northeast corner of Villard and "pronounced it a tree," says University Archivist Keith Richards.

The monolith is among the 68 gifts donated to the University by graduating classes since 1878, a practice that ended in 1968, only a few years before class officers were voted out of existence by the student body.

The first senior class gift, donated by the four students from the Class of 1878, was an English Laurel tree and \$100 to help build the Art Museum.

The University received 21 trees from graduating classes before 1900, when other gifts became fashionable.

"I don't think people recognized the historical value of the trees," Richards says.

Other gifts have also lost their significance over the years. In 1910, seniors donated a stone bench which was placed outside the east entrance of Fenton Hall. Only seniors were allowed to sit on the bench, a tradition passed down by upperclassmen in no uncertain terms.

"Thou shalt not rest thy foul haunches upon the Senior Bench," read an edict left by the Class of 1916 sitting in the courtyard between the EMU and Leighton Hall.

But those were the days when freshmen had to wear beanies and were also warned not to bother the coeds.

Some gifts have withstood the test of time. The gates at Howe Field have outlived many of the donors from 1919, as well as the



The class of 1900 left two oak trees — one with a plaque attached — as a gift to the University.

baseball team that used the field.

Construction of the EMU was helped along with a \$67,000 gift from the Class of 1929, and the recently-restored EMU carillon was a joint gift from the classes of 1943 and 1953.

Graduates have also left a legacy of cash. Last year 209 University students received more than \$14,000 in loans from endowments and grants left by graduating classes, according to Larry Tergesen of the University Business Affairs Office. There is another fund of almost \$20,000 available for the descendants of the Class of 1896, which donated the money. It was not used last year, Tergesen said.

The gift tradition is now being revived. The Student University Relations Council, a student public relations group under the auspices of the University Relations office, is sponsoring a plan in which graduating seniors pledge an annual contribution for three years, beginning in 1983.

Project head Matthew Scher-

merhorn said he hopes half of this year's senior class will contribute to the fund, raising more than \$56,000. The money would be put into an endowment fund for the library to use for books and programs.

To date, 25 seniors have pledged \$800 to the fund.

The endowment fund concept will continue next year, with SURC asking members of the Class of 1983 to contribute towards a gift not yet selected.

Secluded in another quiet corner of campus, by Robinson Theater, a dome-shaped iron sculpture rests, rusted by the long years of exposure to Oregon rain. It is the last testament of the final graduating class from the Normal, or two-year teacher program, cut by the Legislature. The Class of 1885 left the sculpture as a memorial.

With the Legislature again in a cutting craze, we may soon see more mute memorials to once-thriving programs.

By Phil Lemman
Photos by Bob Baker

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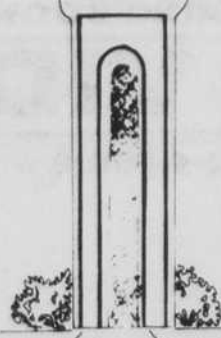


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