

Officials pan PLC's 'graceless' design

Funding blamed for functional downfalls

When the State System of Higher Education axes construction funds, disaster can fall on architectural blueprints like it did with the University Prince Lucien Campbell building, a former University president says.

And even though the PLC walls haven't crumbled and the demolition company hasn't showed up yet, PLC is "utterly graceless," says Earl Pomeroy, retired University professor.

But, "it stands the test of time," responds George Wallman, who was the physical plant architect at the time.

"You can criticize any building," Wallman says.

"I think they (the architects) were incompetent in the first place but in the second place they had to work with a limited budget," Pomeroy says. His office is on PLC's second floor.

The building is not a good building, agrees Robert Clark, former University president. He

'I think it is unpleasant to walk through the halls. They have no regard for human spirit.'

— Robert Clark

worked closely with the architects when PLC was constructed in 1960.

"I think the architects were very good," he says.

But the building still is an unfortunate example of spending a lot of money on a nonfunctional project, Clark says.

Suggestions from University professors could have made the building more functional, Pomeroy says. In the initial planning stages, he thought professors would be able to have some say about how departments and offices would be arranged.

"We labored under the delusion that we would be taken seriously. At one point they gave us a lot of assurance," he says.

He worked with other history professors making a miniature model of their idea of a functional history section in PLC.

"But they ignored all that," he says.

He thinks one of PLC's many problems is the offices — too small. Pipe smoke drifts from one office to the next and phone conversations can be heard through the walls, Pomeroy says.

"The main thing is it's ugly," he says. He thinks faculty would put up with the small offices and narrow halls if the building looked better than it does.

"These prison-like halls are no place for socializing," he says. Because the corridors are too narrow to hold benches, students waiting to see a

professor must sit on the floor, he says.

And Clark agrees.

"I think it is unpleasant to walk through the halls. They are too narrow. They don't have any regard for the human spirit," Clark says.

"I believe the public has a responsibility in spending public money to design and provide buildings that are both functional and approvable by human and aesthetic values," Clark says.

"The building is a box in egg-crate fashion."

Because the state system department of finance cut funds for the PLC project, "they destroyed effectiveness of architects' designs," Clark says.

So PLC problems remain because of budget cuts, and ultimately because of a state-wide financial crisis that hit the University in 1957, Clark says.

That was about the time the planning committee submitted preliminary plans to the State Board of Higher Education finance committee, recalls John Lallas, University executive dean.

The original plans had to meet requirements from "innumerable offices," Wallman says.

The planners had to keep in mind that not much space was available and because of limited space, architectural trends in the 1960s leaned toward high-rise educational buildings, he says. Space utilization was a national issue at the time.

Once the preliminary plans were at the state level, Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., recommended the state Legislature reduce PLC funds, says Jack Hunderup, University vice-chancellor and one of the people on the planning committee when PLC was built.

And Hatfield, Oregon governor at the time, approved only construction plans for offices, not for classrooms or laboratories as the original PLC included, Hunderup says.

Also cut from the original blueprint was a central lobby reading area with facilities to display art, Clark says.

"It was designed as a humanities building and reflected something of the values of the humanities," Clark says.

"The legislature and the executive office did not have the proper aesthetic standards. They used economic factors as really about the only criterion," he says.

After the funds were slashed, University planners tried to make amends by saving money when possible.

So they wanted to use a University architect from the architect school to design the building, but state policy requires its institutions to put projects out for bid, Clark says.

Clark says he even tried visiting the finance committee in Salem to plead for a better building. As a result of his visit, PLC professors' offices are twice as large as they would have been if Clark hadn't made the visit.

"I think public officials ought to be responsible for values," he says.

"People are concerned with the environment in this state. They ought to be concerned with the environment in our buildings."

When Clark looks at the old buildings on campus he says PLC falls short in comparison.

"Our forebears left us something we can be proud of. Our deceased can't be proud of a building like PLC," Clark says.

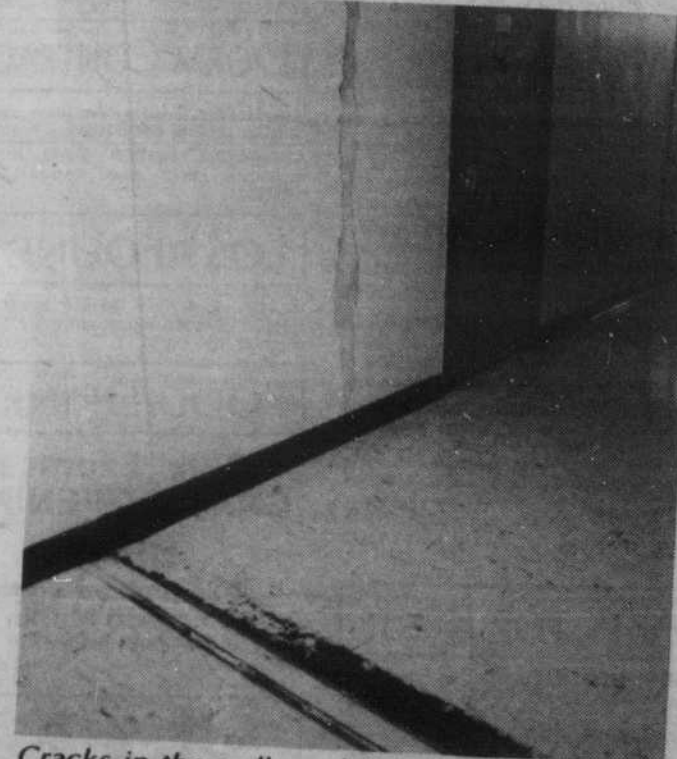
And neither would the man the building was named after, says University archivist Keith Richards.

"Prince Campbell loved good architecture so we named that building after him," Richards says jokingly.

Story by Melissa Martin
Photos by Dave Kao



It's "utterly graceless," says retired Prof. Earl Pomeroy. The elevator shaft at the top of the building is an example of the lack of artistic value in the building, he says.



Cracks in the walls and floors appeared about five years after PLC was constructed.



PLC hallways, "have no regard for the human spirit," says former University Pres. Robert Clark, because they are too narrow.



History Prof. Jack Maddex is wondering where he will put the next addition to his book collection in his office on the fourth floor of PLC.