

'Smothered' in sibling silliness
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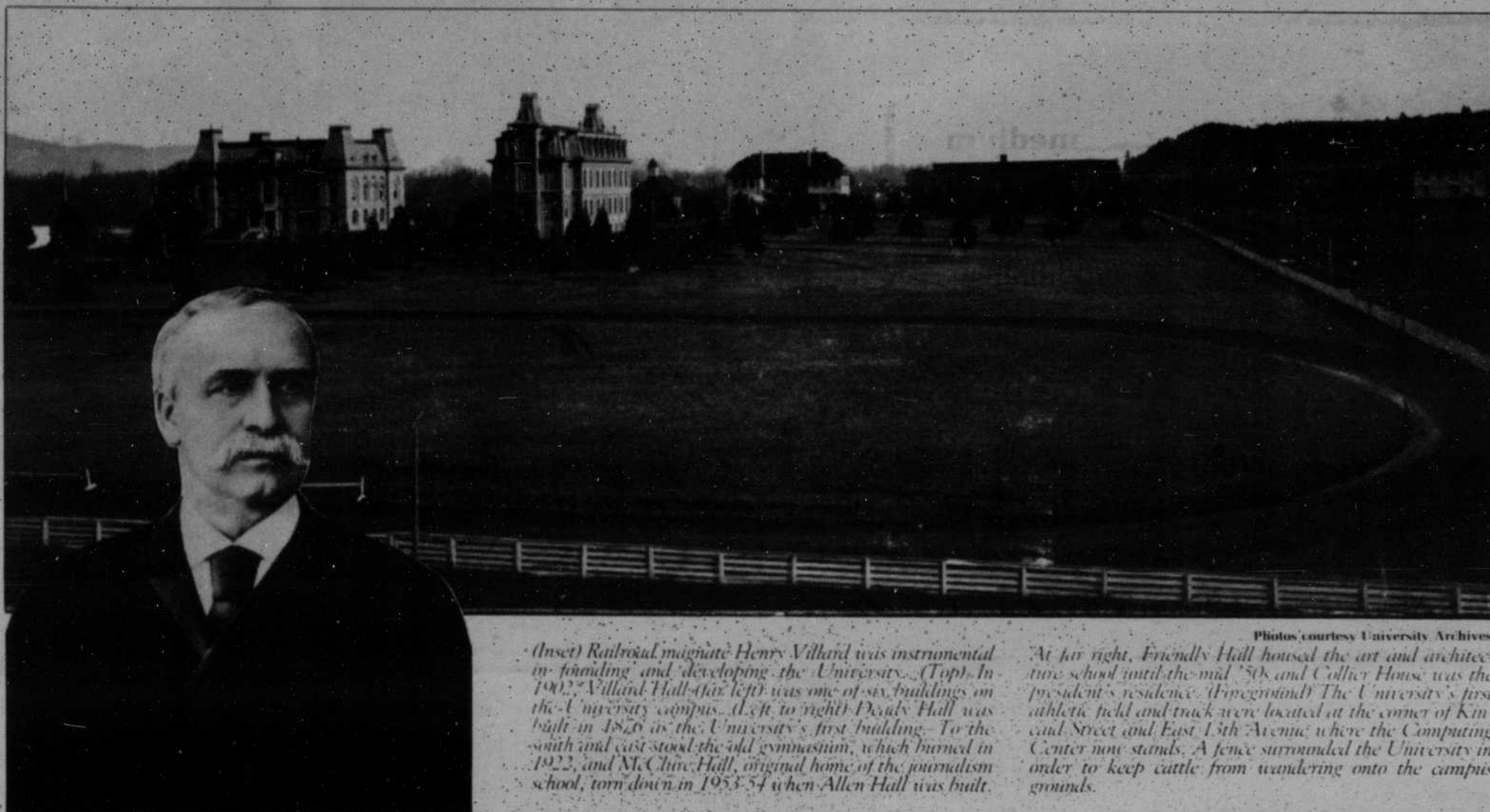
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Arts and Entertainment

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A century-long performance...



Photos courtesy University Archives

(Inset) Railroad magnate Henry Villard was instrumental in founding and developing the University. (Top) In 1902, Villard Hall (far left) was one of six buildings on the University campus. (Left to right) Peavy Hall was built in 1876 as the University's first building. To the south and east stood the old gymnasium, which burned in 1922, and McClure Hall, original home of the journalism school, torn down in 1953-54 when Allen Hall was built.

At far right, Friendly Hall housed the art and architecture school until the mid '50s and Collier House was the president's residence. (Foreground) The University's first athletic field and track were located at the corner of Kincaid Street and East 15th Avenue where the Computing Center now stands. A fence surrounded the University in order to keep cattle from wandering onto the campus grounds.

Villard Hall, one of the oldest buildings on campus, celebrates its one-hundredth birthday today. Home of the speech, telecommunications and theater departments, the structure is named after Henry Villard, one of the University's founding fathers.

The anniversary celebration will be commemorated by a nostalgic theatrical revue directed by Horace Robinson, professor emeritus of theater and director emeritus of University Theatre. Performances are scheduled at 8 p.m. in Villard Hall's Robinson Theatre, home of University Theatre. Robinson Theatre, named after Horace, was built onto the front of Villard Hall in the late 1940s.

Robinson, who began teaching and directing theater at the University in 1933, has never really retired. He maintains an office in Villard Hall, where some 3,000 volumes look down on visitors from the west wall and awards and honoraria cover the north. On the south wall, a large heraldic crest from a production by Robinson of "The Royal Hunt of the Sun" hangs imposingly.

Robinson's eyes sparkled as he spoke, and the supple quality of his voice belied his 76 years. He enjoys talking about the "old days," and about the development of theater at the University.

"We are actually an area of study in the speech department," Robinson explained. "There were just two of us in the theater area in 1933; Mrs. Otilie Seybolt was the head of the area, and principal director, and I was her scene designer and technician, and remained so for about the first 13 years.

"I was teaching what was then a full load of courses — four courses — as well as doing the theater work. The theater department was very popular, but obviously, it was understaffed, but we did the usual number of prescribed courses, as well as six full-length productions every year.

"The department was in Johnson Hall... which also housed the theater, when I started. There was some storage space I had some things in under this building (Villard), but I really had very little associa-

tion with Villard Hall at that time."

Robinson became head of the theater department and director of University Theatre in 1946.

"Mrs. Seybolt continued to work under me; she passed away a number of years ago, I assume, and I think the records assume that I took over her position in 1946, but it wasn't a very official act, so no one really knows for sure," he said.

Robinson said that the Villard Hall Centennial Dramatic Revue would not include any of the productions he had directed.

Story by William Homans

"We're going further back than that. We will be doing historical material from the turn of the century: a production of a scene from 'The Lady of Lyons,' which was the first scene ever done on the campus — in 1876... the year that the University was founded.

"They were not allowed to do plays on the campus, but they were allowed to read aloud many very fine pieces of English literature. Plays were 'verboten.' There was a very strong Victorian ethic on the University of Oregon campus. There were four professors on the campus at first, and three of them had originally been ministers."

Robinson has helped commemorate other centennials. He helped direct Eugene's Oregon Trail Pageants from the 1930s through the '50s, a period when much of the West observed frequent centennial celebrations. Robinson's production company did historical pageants in various cities, involving the local people, and always involving the local history.

The theater department has evolved from 1933, when Robinson and Seybolt alone comprised the department faculty, to today with seven professors, plus two full-time administrative employees.

Asked about his personal achievements in University Theatre, Robinson modestly stated, "That's a hard question, because things that are important to me might not be important to the public in general. I'm very proud of the fact that I have done a great number of so-called manuscript plays, giving them their premiere. I have directed opera, musical comedies. I have commissioned the composition of music and ballet, and so on. I'd like to feel that the contribution is a very diversified one."

Robinson said that University Theatre was the major theatre in Oregon when he arrived on campus in 1933; Ashland's Shakespearean Festival would not arrive for another two years.

"We were the best theatre the state had, and appealed primarily, though I would not say purposely, to adult community audiences. Now we serve more particularly the student who's on the campus," Robinson said.

He spoke of the sacrifices he and his colleagues have made to make theater a success in Eugene. "The theater activity — the producing of plays, etcetera, has been over and above a standard teaching load on the part of the faculty.

"They teach the same number of courses that another department's faculty does, and in addition to that, they'll make all the scenery, make all the costumes, direct all the plays, collect all the tickets, and so forth, out of a personal sense of affection and sense of responsibility to a growing theatre. Those people often dedicated all their waking hours to the theatre, and gave up a lot of things as a consequence."

Robinson explained the plays which will be produced during the Villard Hall centennial. "Besides 'Lady of Lyons,' there will be a repeat of our recent performance of 'The Rivals' — not the whole play, just a scene. This was the fifth full-length play to be performed on the UofO campus, in 1907.

"We will also see a dance by (mother of modern dance) Isadora Duncan, which at that time was con-

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