

# Old Old Main, Only Campus Building, Houses Students, Faculty, Classrooms, 2 Literary Societies Were First Activities

The history of the University almost can be told in terms of the history of one building—Old Main.

For more than 30 years the original Old Main, started in 1856 and not completed until 1863, was the entire school. It housed everything at the agricultural school except the livestock—and sometimes even the livestock when prankster students installed a cow or mule in the tower or bedded down overnight some pigs on corn stalks in a classroom. The object was to horrify an unpopular professor when he opened the door in the morning.

The present Old Main, which occupies the same site as the original structure, was completed in 1929 and is but one of about 100 major buildings on the campus. The early students at the University lived in Old Main, had all their classes there, took part in rhetoricals conducted by literary societies, studied in the library, performed experiments in the laboratories, met with classmates and professors in common rooms, worshipped in the chapel. In short, the one building was the center of all their school activities.

### Limestone Structure

The early building is described as a limestone structure, 240 feet in length, 80 feet wide and five stories high, with ample lodging rooms, chapel, library, lecture and recitation rooms, laboratories, cabinets, refectory, and infirmary, for 200 students.

The older building had a domed cupola, and the tower was not built until 1896.

Plans for establishing a school were first brought up by the Agricultural Society of Pennsylvania in 1853. A charter was granted and 200 acres of land for the school was donated by James Irvin of Centre County.

### Funds Donated

To start, the board of trustees had the land, \$10,000 donated by Centre County citizens, \$10,000 given by the State agricultural society, and \$5000 bequeathed to the school by Elliott Cresson of Philadelphia. The board planned to ask the legislature for \$50,000 to add to these funds.

The contract was let for \$55,000 and work was started in June, 1856. After economic and labor difficulties, about one-third of the building was finished on Feb. 16, 1859, and it was opened to students. About 119 of them arrived, many by bobsled from Spruce Creek and others from Bellefonte, the two nearest transportation terminals.

### School Isolated

The school was isolated. The nearest postoffice was at Boalsburg several miles away.

Students rose at 5 a.m. and began classes, after devotionals and breakfast, at 6 a.m. The day was divided into periods of instruction and labor, one of the requirements being three hours work daily on the farm. This consisted primarily of picking up and carting off rocks.

The Civil War interrupted plans to complete the building and the first Old Main was not finished until December, 1863. When completed, it contained 165 dormitory rooms, a library, four museums, two chemical laboratories, two lecture rooms, four recitation rooms, a large chapel, two assembly rooms, a kitchen and dining room, and living quarters for professors and their families.

### Women Admitted

New curriculums were added and in 1873 women students were admitted for the first time. They were housed on the top floors of the west wing under the direct supervision of a lady principal.

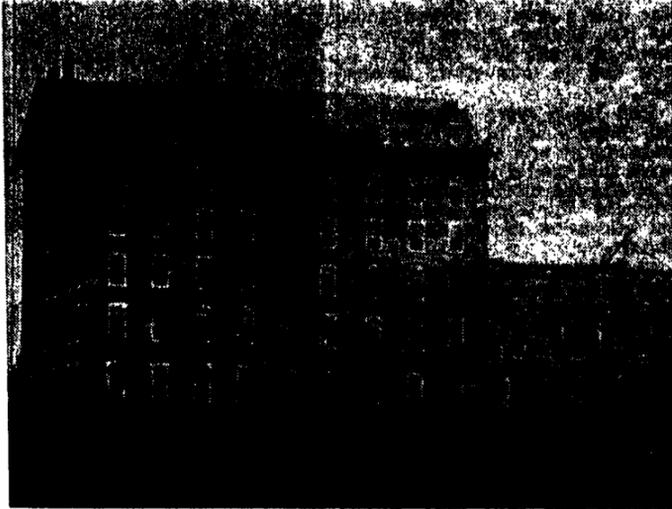
One of the features of the building not mentioned in current literature was the five-story privy erected at the back with entrances leading from each floor. Students called this noxious edifice the "shot tower."

Water was pumped from an artesian well and in 1887 the building was lighted by incandescent electric lights.

A fire in 1892 led to changes in Old Main. The roof was built higher, numerous gabled dormer windows were added to the attic, and a small tower was built on top.

Small buildings to house various departments were built in the 1880's and in 1889 a large armory

(Continued on page 46)



OLD MAIN, the sole building on campus, was incomplete when it greeted the first class of students in 1859. The Civil War created a shortage of material and it was not until 1863 that the building, known then as Main Building, was finished. It housed all classrooms, living quarters for faculty members, and rooms for students. Fire in 1892 destroyed most of the building.

## University Archives Started In Early 1900's by Dr. Runkle

The University probably has never had more reason to appreciate the efforts of Dr. Erwin Runkle in the early 1900's than it does today.

Dr. Runkle began the Penn State archives. The early records were housed in Carnegie Hall which, at that time, served as the library building.

Dr. Runkle's collection served as the nucleus of the Penn State Room on the fourth floor of Pattee Library. This room has been the source for the thousands of historical articles which the University, through the Department of Public Information, is circulating in its Centennial year promotional effort.

The Penn State Room houses the University's history. Files, book cases, and card catalogs hold the complete written record—presidents' reports to the trustees, bound files of campus publications, alumni news issues, catalogs, and reports from each president's administration.

There is a file of clippings of University alumni, and faculty and staff members who have been reported on in off-campus publications. One wall is lined by books written by University faculty members and alumni.

Another file contains programs of events on campus by years and another holds thousands of early pictures. These become more and more valuable as time goes on.

Furniture used by past presidents, pictures depicting the growth of the University, and seals which have been used during the past 100 years are on exhibition.

One of the most recent additions is a sedile—the chair used during graduation ceremonies during the terms of Presidents Sparks, Thomas, and Hetzel.

Mrs. Thomas I. Mairs is in charge of the collection. She and her assistants do much of the collecting and supervising of the cataloging of material.

Many students have found the room an interesting place in which to spend a few hours browsing through the University's past.

Any student who didn't join one of the University's first two literary societies was considered a social outcast and a curiosity, when the University was founded.

The Washington and Cresson literary societies were formed within two weeks of the founding of the University, in 1859. They were the social, intellectual, political, and debating clubs of the school for 31 years until 1890.

Membership was originally determined by drawing lots but eventually by competitive rushing of freshmen by the seniors.

Each group had a hall, a piano, and a library. Dues were nominal—and hard to collect. The programs consisted of debates, essays, music, intermission, and the business meeting.

The success of the societies was probably due to the total lack of fraternities, dances, and other activities. Coeds didn't appear on campus until 1871, and even then they were scarce and dating regulations were harsh. Dancing was prohibited until 1890. Card games and drinking were not allowed.

### Molasses Smearing

Aside from pranks, such as smearing molasses on stair banisters during public meetings, stealing chickens from the campus farms, and replacing the oil in hall lamps with water, the student had little relief from a staunchly disciplined life.

Thus, 7 p.m. Friday became the brightest hour of the week because the literary societies met in their halls in the fifth floor of Old Main.

The first campus publications, carrying editorials, programmes, jokes and advertisements, were published by the societies.

The two groups carried on spirited but friendly rivalry in debating as well as for membership. In 1891, the two societies debated the topic, "Resolved: That Canada be annexed to the United States."

### Chicken or Eggs First

At the meetings, the debate topics ranged from the intelligence of women compared to that of men to whether sheep like cats. Typical topics for debate were: Labor, a blessing or a curse? Is a mad hog more dangerous than a mad cat? And, inevitably, Did the first chicken come out of an egg or the first egg out of a chicken?

The decline of the societies, 30 years after their birth, was blamed not on a lack of debate topics but on the rise of fraternities, which offered more social opportunities; on increased athletic activities; and on the growing stress of technological students, who had little time for debates.

The societies were formally dis-

## Willard Taught Math Students For 30 Years

By EVELYN ONSA

Willard Hall is one of the most prominent symbols of New England's representation at the University—the building was named for Joseph Moody Willard, a New Hampshire man of old Puritan stock who headed the mathematics department for 30 years.

Willard, affectionately nicknamed "Josie" by his students—came to the University in the fall of 1893 with his wife Henrietta. They lived in Woman's Building before moving into the yellow frame house west of the Pattee Library.

He was known for saying things in the simplest way possible. One time he sat in on a meeting of a committee which was trying to establish a conglomerate course of algebra, geometry, and trigonometry in one three-hour course. After it was over he summed up his objection to this by saying that he was not at all convinced that hash was better food than meat and potatoes or that it was as palatable. There was no more talk of introducing such a course.

He has the unique honor of having two LaVie's dedicated to him by the classes of 1915 and 1925. His portrait, which hangs in the building bearing his name, was dedicated by the class of 1910.

Before he came to the University, Willard was a Phi Beta Kappa at Dartmouth. Then he took graduate work at Johns Hopkins University where he met his future wife. Thirty classes of University students can attest his ability as a teacher. He never wrote a book but spent his time and devoted the rest of his life to the expansion and betterment of the University.

banded in 1896. Their libraries were combined too for the nucleus of the University library, their halls became the office of the Young Men's Christian Association and a classroom.

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