The University of Oregon and the Cemetery

Perhaps the most prominent difference between Eugene and its neighbors in the Willamette Valley is that Eugene has the University of Oregon. Today it is hard to imagine the city without it. But just one hundred years ago — even after they had actually founded the school — citizens of Eugene didn't know for certain from year to year if it would remain here.

They had fought to get it. City leaders like Sam Friendly and Tom Hendricks. Less-familiar but no less important names, like Will Abrams and John Thompson. And many whose names we probably will never know, but whose contributions came in the form of a few dollars, or livestock, produce, a bushel of wheat — anything that could be sold and turned into cash.

They got the university and they kept it. So that names like Johnson, Condon, Campbell and Kerns would be known for what they did here and not somewhere else. So that when we walk through the Masonic Cemetery, we can see the many names that remind us of their vision — a vision best summed up in the words of Roman orator Cicero: "What greater or better gift can one offer to the Republic than to teach and instruct its youth?"

Top right: John Wesley Johnson.

JOHN WESLEY JOHNSON

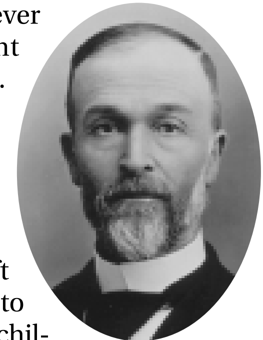
The first president of the University of Oregon, John Wesley Johnson (1836-1898), was a man known for his stern countenance, unfailing strength and fortitude, and high-minded purpose. Born in Missouri, he drove an ox team on the Oregon Trail at age fourteen, losing his mother and a sister to cholera along the way. After obtaining all the education available in 1850s Oregon, he borrowed money and took a ship back east to attend school at Yale. Graduating sixth in his class, he returned to Oregon in 1862, intending to be a lawyer. But the need for lawyers on the frontier was not great, so he took up teaching.

After filling academic positions in McMinnville and Portland, Johnson was personally recruited in 1876 by Thomas G. Hendricks, a prominent member of the Union University Association, to become the new Eugene school's inaugural president. He served for seventeen years.

His dedication to the university was absolute. He cut his personal costs while traveling on university business, cut his salary when the university faculty budget was reduced, and gave money from his own pocket when the lone university building (Deady Hall) was threatened with foreclosure.

"Pioneering in the cause of public education has not been lucrative," he wrote in 1883, "though it has been the source of much happiness all along the path of my professional life."

His work ethic was severe, and he expected the same from his students. A professor of Latin, he drilled his students so that by graduation they could write a grammar of the language. "Dawdling idlers or hopeless incompetents complained of his rigid requirements, but I never heard a good student complain," wrote E.H. McAlister in memorium. "He always helped a student by showing him how to help himself."



But he had a soft side as well, according to Virgil, one of his six children. The president's son recalled how tramps often stopped at the Johnson house on 5th and Lawrence, as the railroad tracks were nearby. "His reason for never turning tramps away from the door, he told me once, was that in San Francisco he had been without a cent to buy food," Virgil wrote. "Too proud to beg, he walked the streets until finally he met a chance friend who loaned him a dollar which was sufficient until he secured a job."

And he had his own brand of humor, as related by Dr. John Straub, who came to the UO as a professor of Greek in 1878. Having been recruited in Portland, Straub arrived in Eugene one evening after a seven-hour train ride from the northern city. At about ten o'clock that night, he walked to the president's house. Unable to find the gate in the dark, he climbed over the high wooden fence, only to be greeted by the owner's hunting dogs. Johnson had already gone to bed, but he came to the door and made an appointment with Straub for the next morning, then directed his caller to the gate.

At this point Straub asked Johnson if his dogs would bite. "No," the president replied. "If they would, they'd have bitten you by now."

THOMAS CONDON

Born in Ireland, Dr. Thomas Condon (1822-1907) is Oregon's most famous geologist, widely recognized as an authority on geological development in the Pacific Northwest. His 1902 book, *The Two Islands*, included his popular writings on the John Day and Willamette valleys.

Condon actually came to the territory in 1852 as a missionary, having received theological training while a young man in New York. With his ability to lecture on both religion and science, he was named to the University of Oregon's first faculty in 1876, where he taught for almost thirty years. The numerous honors to his memory include Condon Hall and the Condon Lecture Series at the university.

Upon his death, Eugene merchants closed their stores the afternoon of his funeral. Tributes came from far and wide, including a special memorial edition of the UO *Bulletin*, which contained a reminiscence from former student Charlotte F. Roberts.

They were studying insects in class, Roberts recalled, and Condon gave a short lecture, presumably on the caddis-fly. "Students," he said, "have you ever walked on the edge of a pond in the summer time and noticed a beautiful, gauzy-winged insect floating in the air over the pond? That is the caddis-fly." The larva first makes a cocoon of meed and fine gravel, which appears to be just an ugly mud roll, Condon said. "But to the intelligent observer these mud rolls contain life, and in process of time you will see the ugly mud casement breaking open and an exquisitely beautiful and dainty creature emerging from its prison cell. Students, I have thought the chrysalis stage of these beautiful flies a fitting illustration of our lives here — limited, confined, often appearing to the world ugly and unattractive, but some day to be transformed into glorious beauty."

But is the caddis-fly aware of this marvelous change daily taking place? "Oh, no! no! no!" the professor continued. "And neither can we know the transformation going on in these prison walls of ours which will some day be burst asunder, and each one of us shall be revealed a glorious, immortal being with different powers, different privileges, and an entirely new life."

MARY SPILLER

Among the members of the first faculty at the UO, there was one woman. Mary Spiller (1831-1901), widowed mother of two, was the first professor of English and elocution, and physical director for women. There was no central living arrangement for female students at the university, so Mrs. Spiller traveled throughout the town, functioning as monitor, advisor, supporter and general mentor for her students.

Physical education for women in 1876 consisted largely of calisthenics performed on the top floor of Deady Hall — or sometimes outside, with the women clothed in "very discreet" black uniforms, recalled Frederic S. Dunn, UO alumnus and professor, writing in 1934. "To insure erect carriage, the women all had on their heads little oblong bags, filled with sand or beans," he said. "They carried white wands, and were taught to execute some very pretty movements."

Spiller's elocution classes consisted of mainly repeating phrases in unison, but her sincerity made up for what the subject may have lacked. "Mrs. Spiller had such a unique way of making you feel a real pride when you had accomplished your task with credit, and, on the other hand, self-abasement if you had failed," Dunn wrote. "She could say 'Pshaw!' or 'Fiddlesticks!' and mean it, too."

The first women's dormitory, built in the early 1900s, was named for her. The original was a wooden frame building, and Dunn pointed out that in time it must inevitably be razed. When a new building takes its place, he hoped, "may this bit of sincere eulogium aid in holding the university to its now-hallowed tradition and insure that the name of Mary Spiller 'shall not perish' from the campus."

Mary Spiller Hall today is a brick building, part of the co-ed Hamilton Complex at East 13th and Agate streets. Students know it as "Spiller."

She could say "Pshaw!" or "Fiddlesticks!" and mean it, too.

Center: UO student in her off-campus room, ca. 1902.

PRINCE LUCIEN CAMPBELL

Prince Lucien Campbell (1861-1925) could rightfully be considered the FDR of the University of Oregon. The institution's fourth president, he served for twenty-three years, from 1902 until his death, taking the UO from the dark hours of an uncertain future to the largest institution of higher learning in the state. "He came to Oregon when it was a college with a preparatory department," said UO Regent Henry McKinney. "He left it a university."

His achievements and recognitions are too numerous to be listed, but his legacy included two solid funding programs: the property millage tax, in which a certain percent of all state property taxes go to the university, and the gift campaign — which began a program of private contributions that continue to this day.

A man unanimously respected for his integrity, fair-mindedness and dedication, he was that rare kind of person who was apparently perfectly matched to his job. "I get so much pleasure out of the work that I do," he said, "that I have a kind of 'sneaking' feeling about accepting a salary for doing it."

He made time for other pursuits as well, believing strongly in physical as well as intellectual exercise. He was an avid mountain climber who reached the summit of many Cascade peaks — including Mt. Rainier when he was fifty-seven years old.

He was also a member of the first party to spend a night on Mt. Hood, and published his account in *Oregon Monthly* magazine in 1907. After making camp in a snow bank for shelter from the terrible wind, he wrote, they prepared to light a bright fire and set off rockets as a signal to people waiting in the world below. "Anxious eyes we knew were watching from the foot of the mountain, and we hoped that many were keeping a lookout from Portland and the valley towns," But the wind kept them from so much as lighting a match, until finally they decided to dig a hole in the snow and fill it with kerosene-saturated paper and gunpowder. "The powder was divided and the experiment tried. To our great joy the paper caught, the powder flashed up with a blinding light into the first signal fire ever burned on the top of Hood.

"A second fire was lighted soon after," he continued, "and then the rockets were sent up, breasting the wind beautifully and leaving a glowing trail of sparks behind."

He believed strongly in both physical and intellectual exercise.

SUSAN CAMPBELL

Susan Campbell (1857-1932), wife of Prince Lucien Campbell, left her own individual mark on the UO. Long active in the growth and progress of the university, she was known also for her work in other areas. "Every good cause found a friend in her," said *Old Oregon*, the UO alumni magazine, upon her death. "The work for the crippled children, the Red Cross, the Murray Warner Museum of Oriental Art, the Lane County Health Association, the Y.W.C.A., the student loan work, internationalism, social hygiene, the Old Age Relief fund and many more."

But it was the university that Mrs. Campbell considered her closest family. She came to the UO in 1905, as supervisor of student living, and married President Campbell in 1908. She knew hundreds of students personally, and maintained a constant interest in their welfare and activities.

In 1921, a women's dormitory was built and named Susan Campbell Hall. The building today houses the Chancellor's Office of the Oregon University System. A bronze portrait of Mrs. Campbell can still be found there, bearing an inscription of Tennyson's words, "Yoked in all enterprise of noble end." And underneath, "Benevolence, Simplicity, Love."

Top left: Prince Lucien Campbell.
Lower right: Student outing in early days of the UO.

MAUDE KERNS

A native Oregonian, Maude Kerns (1876-1965) grew up to become an artist better known outside her home state than within. During her lifetime, her paintings were exhibited in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Paris, and Japan. Several of her works are today part of the Guggenheim Museum's permanent collection. In Eugene, she spent twenty-five years teaching art at the university.

At a time when "a woman's place was in the home," she chose a career over marriage. Graduating from the UO in 1899, she went to San Francisco, and later New York, to study art. By 1907, she had two university degrees, formal art training, and professional training in art education. She took a job at a Seattle high school, teaching drawing and sewing.

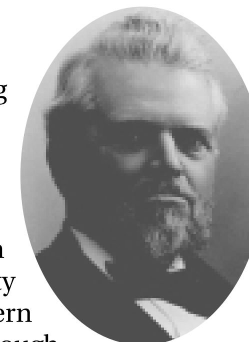
She returned to the UO in 1921, to head the program in Normal Art, or art for teachers. Here she taught drawing, painting and interior decorating, among other courses, until her retirement in 1947, at age seventy.

Throughout her career, Kerns painted in several styles, from impressionist landscapes to modern abstract art. In the 1940s, she turned to "non-objective art," which employed symbols rather than realistic objects to express the moods, emotions, or spirituality of the artist. While the Pacific Northwest was not particularly receptive to abstract painting at the time, Kerns still painted as she pleased. "To be afraid of what is different or unfamiliar is to be afraid of life," she said.

But she also held herself to a kind of Victorian obligation. Urged by colleagues to move to New York, she chose instead to remain in Eugene, caring for her aging mother. When her brother-in-law, Eugene businessman Frank Chambers died, Kerns moved into the Chambers home to live with her sister, **Edith**, and used the basement there as a studio.

Besides her many gifts and endowments bequeathed to the UO, Kerns gave a house near the university to a local arts group, on the condition that it be named for her. This property was later sold and the Maude Kerns Art Center moved to a former church building at 15th and Villard streets, where it operates today.

GEORGE H. COLLIER



George Collier (1827-1916) joined the UO faculty in 1879, as a professor of physics and chemistry. His genial and dignified manner endeared him to all and served as his authority in the classroom, recalled former student Frederic Dunn in 1934. "There was no thought of correction or disciplinary measure where Dr. Collier taught, for his very modesty and wholesome absence of egotism would have made a student misdemeanor seem like crime against divinity."

Collier and his wife, **Sybel Smith Collier**, had seven children, and in 1885 began building a large house at the corner of 13th and University streets. They moved in the following year, and it served as their home until Collier left the UO faculty in 1895. The university bought the house in 1896, intending to make it a women's dormitory. But that plan was quickly abandoned, and the house became the home of UO presidents from 1899 to 1941, and later the Faculty Club. Today it is a Eugene landmark, operating as a restaurant open to the general public.

A nineteenth-century educator, Collier was forced to retire early when the young and progressive president, C.H. Chapman, restructured the UO curriculum to attract faculty with more modern training. But although the physics professor's background may have been somewhat dated, his outlook was to the future. When discussing the theory of sound vibrations one day in the early 1880s, Collier was asked by a student if he thought telegraphic messages would ever be sent without the use of wires. "No question of it," the professor replied. "I may not live to see it, but the rest of you will."

He was half right. The first successful wireless messages were sent in 1895, twenty-one years before Collier died.

I may not live to see it, but the rest of you will.

Top left: Maude Kerns.
Right: George H. Collier.
Bottom left: "Our Optimist," oil on canvas (painting of UO custodian Billy Rivers), by Maude Kerns.