



Dixon Hall

A MONUMENT OF ARCHITECTURAL BEAUTY REFLECTS CALIFORNIA'S PAST AND PRESENT

BY BETH BAXTER '85

Dixon Hall, one of a trio of distinguished historic buildings that proudly mark the entrance to campus, was rededicated on Friday, November 2. The rededication came 74 years and one day after the dedication on November 1, 1907.

Fronted by the newly landscaped Old Main Park, the renovated Dixon Hall welcomes prospective students with an elegance and grace in keeping

with neighboring South Hall and Old Main. Dixon continues to live up to its 1907 description as "a monument of architectural beauty, an imposing structure to look upon."

Its history dates back to the early years of the 20th century when a group of dedicated trustees had the vision and the determination to do what they believed was necessary for the wellbeing of students.

At a meeting of the Southwestern State Normal School Board of Trustees on December 6, 1905, Principal Dr. Theodore Noss recommended that a new dormitory be built, complete with a dining room and kitchen. His request was based on a gradual increase in attendance that resulted in more than 100 students having to room in the town of California.

The Trustees appointed a committee of five people "to consider the advisability of building, from a financial point of view, the plan of the building to be followed, and location..." Serving on the committee were L.W. Morgan, Joseph Underwood, J.N. Dixon, William H. Binns and Dr. J.A. Letterman.

The committee set to work and reported their findings at the January 1907 Trustees meeting. A fully-equipped building that would meet the requirements of Dr. Noss would cost \$40,000. The School had about \$12,000 in bonds from a former issue, and the rest could be borrowed from banks.

The building, which would be located south of the South Dormitory at a "suitable distance and in line with the present buildings fronting on College Avenue," would include a dining hall large enough to accommodate 450 people and dormitory rooms for 100 students.

A building committee was appointed to prepare preliminary plans and report back to the Trustees as soon as possible. Committee members included G.S. Hornbake, who served as chairman, Joseph Underwood, R.B. Drum, G.G. Hertzog, Frank Craven, W.H. Winfield, and Allen J. White. As president of the Board of Trustees, J.N. Dixon served as an *ex officio* member.

At the Trustees' May meeting, J.C. Fulton of Uniontown was chosen as architect. On June 6, the committee reported on the building plans and location. At that same meeting, the Trustees unanimously approved a resolution naming the building Dixon Hall. A finance committee was also formed.

Loans for the new building were available from Monongahela City Trust Company and Alexander & Company, also of Monongahela; from First National Bank and Peoples Bank, both located in California; First National Bank of Scenery Hill; and the First National Bank of Canonsburg.

B.F. Jones, Jones and Laughlin Steel Company, donated \$2,500 to buy furniture for the dining room. His contribution was the largest single gift received by the school at that time.

At the July meeting, the building contract was awarded to Caldwell and Drake, Columbus, Ohio, the lowest bidder at \$44,454. This bid did not include excavating, connecting the buildings, heating, lighting or decorating. White, a member of the building committee, volunteered to survey the site, locate the corners and establish the grades. Frank Craven, the superintendent of grounds and buildings, supervised the excavating and grading.

The building was an imposing 70 by 134 feet, 56 feet

high from cellar to attic, with over 100 rooms. Four floors—basement, first (dining hall), second and third floor dormitory rooms. The basement contained two large storage rooms and one pastry room; under the dining room were four rooms designed as music, art, school and assembly rooms.

The dining room was 40 by 132 feet, with 18-foot ceilings.

It, like the rest of the building, was heated with steam and lighted by electric chandeliers. Tables and chairs chosen for their aesthetics accommodated 500 people.

The kitchen, a spacious 27 by 40 foot room with 12-foot ceilings, pantry, dish room, refrigerator and elevator were located in the rear of the dining room.

In addition to the dining room, the first floor had a connecting corridor, two lobbies, one parlor, a coatroom, and rest room.

The second and third stories of Dixon each held 22 student rooms, two restrooms, two large linen closets and three lobbies, one of which extended its full length.

The south wing of the building was four stories above the basement. The first and second floors had two lobbies, one parlor, one living room and five bedrooms, for the use of female employees. The third and fourth floors had two lobbies and nine bedrooms and were occupied by students.

The north wing had nine student rooms, leading up from three lobbies. The upper story was used as an art room.

Ground was broken for Dixon Hall in June 1906. Students moved in for the fall 1907 term, and the formal dedication was held in fall 1907. The entire building, furnished and equipped, cost less than \$75,000.



DIXON WAS DESIGNED TO
BE A FITTING COMPANION
TO OLD MAIN, NORTH
AND SOUTH HALLS.

The new Dixon Hall stands as a tribute to the past, while it serves today's students. The outside has changed slightly, but the inside of Dixon Hall bears little resemblance to its predecessor. The space that was the dining room now houses the offices of Academic Records, Financial Aid and the Bursar, with room left over in the former kitchen space for the university's mailroom.

Taking advantage of the high ceilings in the original dining room, project architects MacLachlan Cornelius & Filoni created a mezzanine that houses the admissions and articulation and transfer evaluation offices and overlooks the ground floor.

The second and third floors that originally had student dorm rooms now house the offices of the provost and the dean of the school of graduate studies and research, grants (2nd Floor), the offices of the vice president for administration and finance, human resources, continuous improvement, and payroll (3rd floor).

The former attic, which had been abandoned for years but which originally housed an art room, is now home for the comptroller, budgeting and accounting, and environmental health and safety.

The basement, which had various purposes throughout the years, now houses offices for the physical plant department, purchasing, and inventory and fixed assets.

At the rededication of the classic building, Cal U President Angelo Armenti noted, "The building that we rededicate today aspires greatly to life and the human spirit and, in my view, has succeeded admirably in doing so.

"It dares greatly, and it succeeds. From the exciting atrium, the stately chandeliers on the mezzanine level, to the retention of original doors and windows, this building is not timid," he added. "This building is a tribute to our students and our staff."

Albert Filoni, who represented the architectural firm, said the easy solution would have been to demolish the building. He credited the vision of Armenti and the Council of Trustees, who wanted to preserve a piece of California history. ♦



California University President Dr. Angelo Armenti, Jr., architect Albert Filoni, of MacLachlan Cornelius & Filoni, Lou Marsico of Marsico Corporation, general contractors for the Dixon project, Vice President for Administration and Finance Dr. Allan Golden, and Director of Physical Plant Tom Jameson.

Material for this article was taken from *The Normal Review*, December 1907, and from *California University of Pennsylvania* by Dr. Regis Serinko.

Memories of Dixon



When the Class of 1951 held its 50-year reunion on Alumni Weekend 2001, several of the group agreed to talk about what it was like to live in Dixon Hall in the late 40s and early 50s.

Maxine Moore Bickel '51, Gina Restanio Burton '51, Dorothy "Dottie" Matsco '51, Dolores Flynn Conaway '51, and Sandy Pietrzak stood laughing, chattering, interrupting one another, and generally having a great time, just like they always did as undergraduates when they lived in Dixon Hall.

The women didn't need to be coaxed to reminisce about their days in Dixon. They all remembered them vividly. Everything from the green dining hall uniforms several of them wore every day while they carried the huge trays of food to the neatly arranged tables, to the laundry room sinks where you could wash your clothes using the metal scrub board.

Dinner was served at 6 p.m. and students were required to "dress" for dinner. Men had to wear jackets and ties, women had to wear hose, no bare legs. The gong was played by Tom Dutch '49 they recalled, and then everyone was quiet during the prayer.

Dinner was served family style, with eight at a table, assigned seating. The waitresses were paid 40 cents a meal. "You could make \$1.20 if you served every meal, explained Angeline Restanio "Gina" Burton '51. "I used that money to pay for my piano lessons."

No female was permitted to be out of the residence hall past 7 p.m. "With dinner at six, that didn't give us much time," quipped Matsco. At 10 p.m. everyone had to be in her own room. Sheets were washed in the college laundry, which is now the ceramics studio. Freshmen women had to be in their rooms by 7 p.m. during the week. Rooms were much simpler, "Life was much simpler," added another voice.

There were two doorless cubbyholes on either side of the door as you entered the room, one for each resident. "We had fewer clothes then, too," said one.

Laundry was taken home or washed by hand. One member of the class of '51 admitted that she usually sent her things home, or took them with her. For her, the washboard was for emergencies only.

Two large bathrooms contained gang showers; modesty was left at the door. The group laughed as they recalled how an older student would rise very early to beat the crowd and shower by herself.

Although Dixon Hall has changed, the memories still linger!

This year Dixon Hall will be open for tours during Alumni Weekend. All are cordially invited to visit the building that holds so many memories.