

The Bell Tolls for Throop

Swan or ugly duckling, for 62 years Throop Hall was a campus center and symbol.

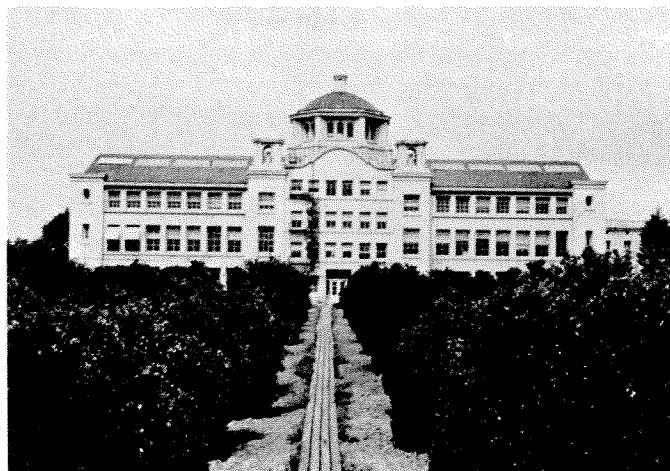
As a center of science and objectivity, Caltech seems an unlikely spot for sentiment. But as 62-year-old Throop Hall undergoes daily dismemberment, it's hard not to feel a few pangs. Aged, decrepit, and impractical as it had become, Throop was still a kind of campus center, a symbol, a reminder of the good old days.

Originally a source of pride to the Pasadena community, and generally described as "a magnificent building," Throop gradually became a catchall for offices for which there was no other place.

If the swan was never really denounced as an ugly duckling, nevertheless Throop began to look more and more out of place alongside the new buildings that sprang up around it. The ultimate disparity was reached in 1967 when rough-visaged, squat old Throop faced the tall, sleek Millikan Library across Millikan's sparkling reflecting pool.

On the morning of February 9, 1971, the San Fernando earthquake jolted Throop's past history and current debility into painful prominence. The walls were newly patterned with cracks that outlined long-sealed-up doors and remodeled walls, and the crumbled plaster revealed the building's dubious structural integrity. On the advice of structural engineers, the trustees reluctantly declared the building unsafe and marked it for demolition.

Throop Hall started as a dream in the mind of George Ellery Hale, the astronomer who was the philosophical architect of the modern Caltech. Back in 1908, when Throop Polytechnic Institute acquired 20 acres for a new campus on the southeast edge of Pasadena, Hale began to see his vision of a college of technology "second to none" move toward realization. As soon as the trustees chose the architects Myron Hunt and Elmer Grey to design the first building, Hale gave them sketches of his ideas for it. His ideas for the school as a whole must have been



In 1910 the east side of Throop Polytechnic's first building had ready-made landscaping—a large and verdant orange grove bisected by a boardwalk.

compelling, for in June of that same year he was able to persuade James A. B. Scherer, president of Newberry College in South Carolina, to become president of Throop.

In October 1908, Hunt and Grey completed their plans for the building that would house the new school, and Hunt presented them publicly in an illustrated lantern-slide talk. The event drew a large crowd of culture-conscious Pasadenans, who became so enthusiastic about this addition to the town's prestige that they raised \$160,000 for its construction. The courtly trustees gratefully christened the building Pasadena Hall, though that designation lasted only ten years.

When Scherer moved to Pasadena in November, he started poring over—and changing—the architects' plans. Eventually he made so many revisions that the trustees had to effect a compromise between him and the anguished architects. The compromise must have been to Scherer's advantage, because Hunt made no secret of his feeling that Pasadena Hall would be an architectural disaster. He described it as "Newberry plus the addition of that ridiculous, hard-to-reach, tower room!" The tower room became known around Pasadena as Hunt's Heartache.

But Hunt and Grey had their way when it came to the facade. Bolstered by Norman Bridge, president of the board of trustees, they declared that this first building on the new campus was symbolic of the glorious future of the

fledgling school and that its entrance, therefore, should be imposing. They recommended that Alexander Stirling Calder, a Pasadena resident and a widely known sculptor, should design something to fit such a concept. Calder thought of sculptured arches gracing the building's entrance porch, but most of the trustees felt this was a bit grandiose. However, Bridge persuaded them to change their minds—partly, perhaps, because he offered to pay Calder's commission himself.

Although the building was not dedicated until June 8, 1910, the arches were unveiled in February. News of Calder's work had received so much attention that people came from all over the Southland to witness the presentation of the masterpiece. David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University, gave the dedication address, remarking that future generations would be "amazed to find an achievement of this magnitude in this city on the outermost Western coast, far removed from all art centers."

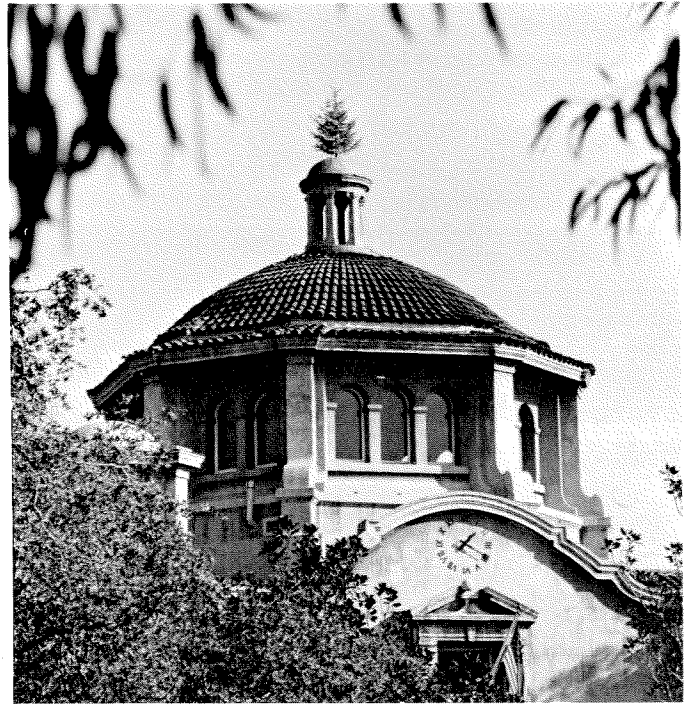
Henry Van Dyke, a favorite poet of the era, was also on hand, with verses especially written about "the flowery Southland fair, with sweet and crystal air."

The dedication of the building itself was attended by 3,000 people, who heard the builder, William Crowell, proudly announce that it contained 14,000 tons of materials. And architect Hunt declared—somewhat over-optimistically it turns out—that Pasadena Hall was "built for the centuries to come . . . it is fireproof and it is earthquake proof." The *Los Angeles Daily News* reported that "the building is wonderful. There are 62 large class and lecture rooms, with offices adjoining them."

With a faculty of 12, a student body of 31, and a curriculum focused largely on electrical, mechanical, and civil engineering, Throop Polytechnic Institute began instruction on its new campus in September 1910. Pasadena Hall, its only building (until the construction of Gates Laboratory in 1918), contained a staggering \$40,000 worth of scientific and engineering equipment.

And formal instruction was not the only activity that went on in Pasadena Hall. For approximately 15 years, it was also the setting for a great deal of Pasadena's very active cultural life. Through Calder's archways came visiting lecturers and performers in the fields of art, literature, and music. In 1911 both Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft gave speeches from its front steps. The influential Pasadena Music and Art Association held its musicales and exhibits inside.

Jesse DuMond, professor of physics emeritus, who came



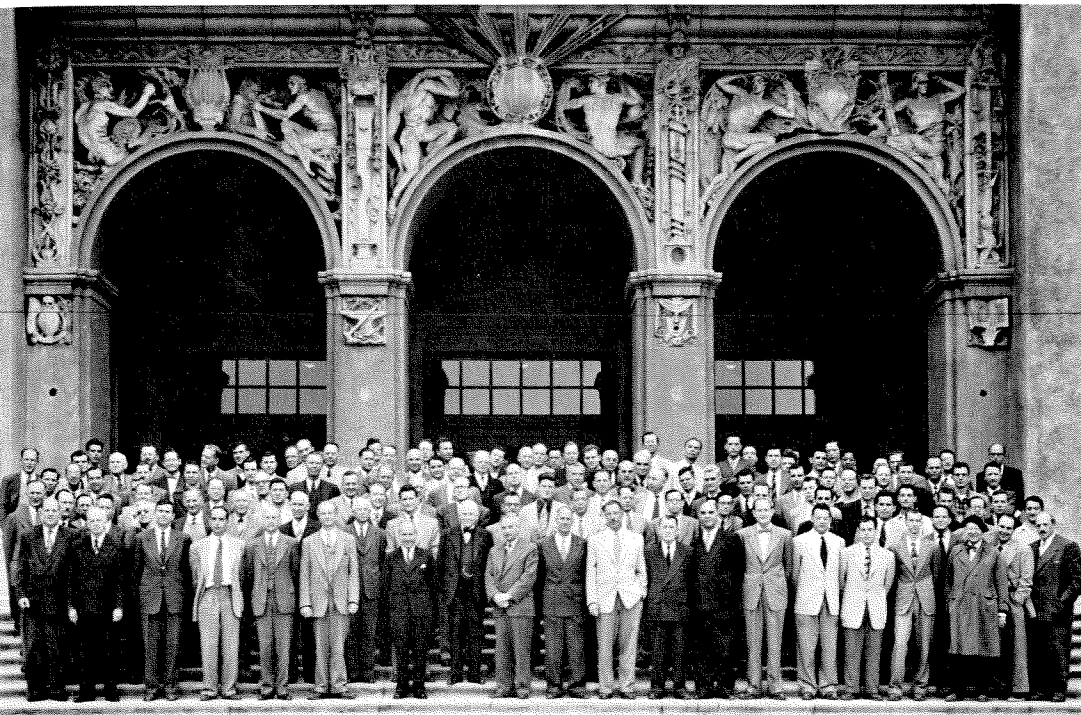
Throop's cupola may have been something less than an architectural triumph, but it made a superb base for a Christmas tree.

to the Institute as a freshman in September 1911, recalls that his first impression of Pasadena Hall was of "laboratories and classrooms filling the building completely, from basement to cupola."

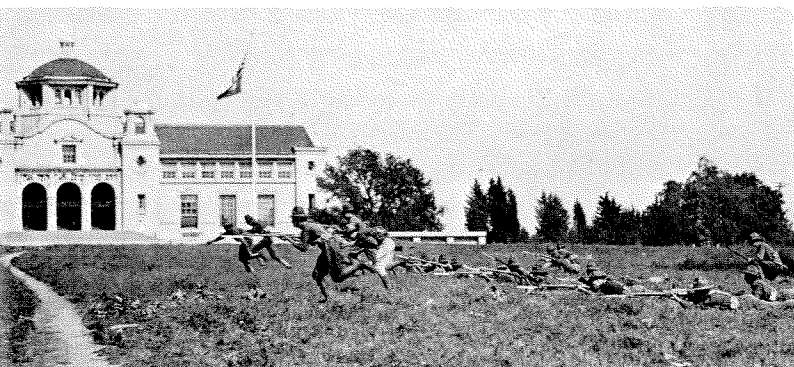
The ground floor held the hydraulics and electrical engineering laboratories. Students wore coats and ties to class in those days, and it is a tribute to their agility, perhaps, that there is no record of anybody's tie ever getting caught in the wheels, pulleys, and straps that were so large a part of the equipment of the labs. And while shower stalls were rare at that time, the students were still ingenious enough to find a way to immerse their classmates. They doused them in the vats in the hydraulics laboratory.

The administrative offices were on the main floor; the second floor had the classrooms, offices, and laboratories for civil and mechanical engineering (neatly divided, with civil engineering at the south end and mechanical at the north); and the third floor was entirely devoted to drafting.

The pulse of the Institute was in a large room to the south of the main entrance on the first floor—an area most recently occupied by the offices of the secretary to the board of trustees and the vice president for business



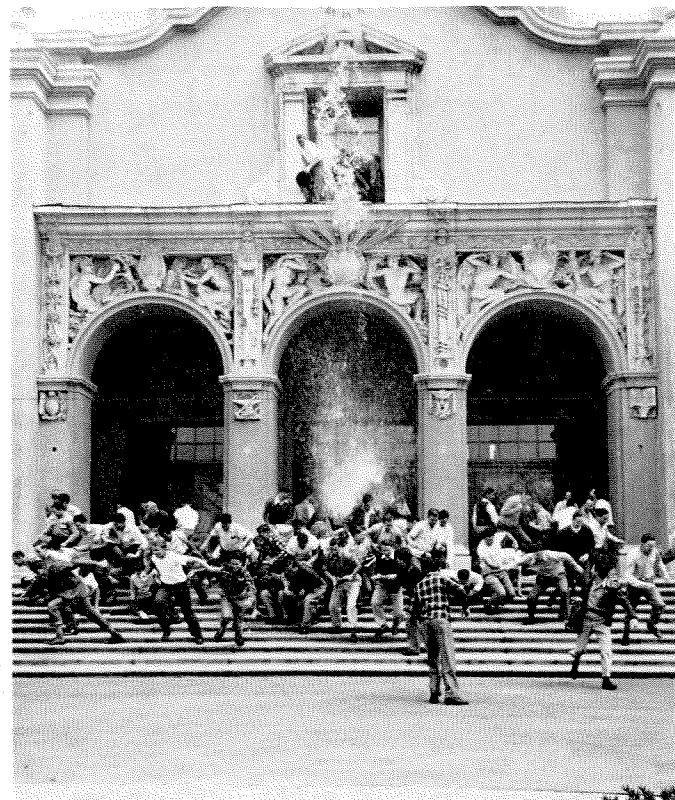
Just 20 years ago, the entire faculty could—and would—pose under Calder's arches.



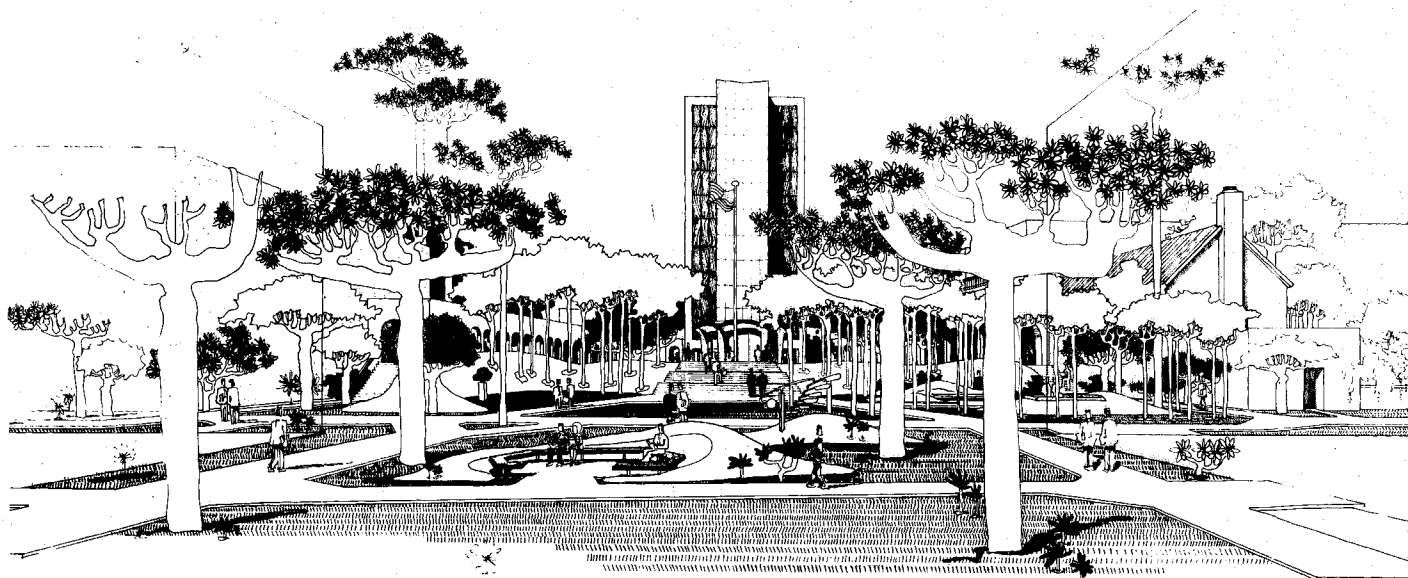
During World War I the Student Army Training Corps drilled regularly on the no man's land in front of Throop.



Thanks to the steeplejacks of the Fleming House Mickey Mouse Club, the Throop clock got a new face in 1965.



Throop's architectural features provided an ideal setting for water fights.



The site of Throop Hall will become a much needed, parklike, open space—with a vista of tree-shaded walks and lawns from the Athenaeum to Millikan Library.

and finance. This was female territory. There, Inga Howard, secretary to President Scherer, also occasionally typed students' papers and pasted ribbons on the diplomas. Grace Sage, the bookkeeper, made all her entries by hand; and a Miss Spinning guarded the library in one corner. Elizabeth Allen was secretary to the Institute's financial watchdog, Ned Barrett. She also answered the phone and saw to the bookstore across the vestibule. Miss Allen precipitated one of the school's earliest romances when she met and married Ernest Swift, then a teaching fellow in chemistry and now professor of chemistry emeritus.

One area of the main floor was not dedicated to administration—the classroom at the northeast corner of the building, presided over by Professor Clinton Judy. This was the humanities department. Evidently Professor Judy didn't need any more space, because his influence transcended the four walls. Frank Capra, '18, credits Judy with leading him into the world of the humanities—and through this to much of the humanist philosophy that later made his films world famous.

Capra edited the student newspaper in a small office in the basement of the building, just inside the back door—a room most recently occupied by the security office. He remembers the graduation ceremonies on Throop's front steps, the ROTC drills on the vast dirt area to the west of the steps, and the grove of orange trees in the "back yard" to the east. "In the spring the smell of the blossoms was truly unforgettable."

In 1910 Throop Polytechnic Institute dropped its Normal, Commercial, Grammar, and Academy schools so it could concentrate on becoming a "first-rate technical school" at the college level. In 1913 the trustees changed the name of the school to Throop College of Technology. By that time the enrollment had almost doubled, and by 1915 it had doubled again. Such growth inevitably produced changes in the use of Pasadena Hall. Assemblies

and similar events had to be held out of doors. Inside, some controversy arose over the space occupied by a collection of stuffed birds owned by a faculty ornithologist named Dickey. The Dickey birds were banished in favor of more offices.

In 1920 Pasadena Hall officially became Throop Hall in honor of Amos Throop, who had founded Throop Polytechnic back in 1891. The enrollment had now risen to 350.

Over the next half century the rooms in Throop Hall changed shape with the frequency and ease of an amoeba. The first floor was partitioned into more and more offices in the early 1940's when Caltech was swamped with wartime activities. A major remodeling took place in the 1950's. In 1962 the bookstore was moved from the ground floor of Throop to the new Winnett Center. Then the south flight of the original double staircase was demolished to make room for the admissions office and an elevator. By 1965 the third floor had been renovated for occupancy by the purchasing department.

Only the southeast corner of the main floor remained, to the last, what it had been since the building opened in 1910—the office of the president. With the move last June of the administrative offices to the third floor of Millikan Library, a 62-year-old tradition ended.

Razing Throop Hall is slated to take about three months, but before it could really begin, two important moves took place. First the statue of Apollo was taken—with care but not a great deal of dignity—to Dabney gardens. And, after a cliff-hanger about the fate of Calder's arches, they seem slated to wind up at the Pasadena City Hall—proving that sentiment still operates. It will be an expensive move, but Pasadena wants to honor its culturally minded pioneers whose faith in their new school of technology was so boundless.

—Janet Lansburgh



Handle with Care

Caltech's peripatetic statue of Apollo spent more than 30 years in the main foyer of Throop, until remodeling in the 1940's banished him to the balcony between Throop and Kellogg for his second three decades on the campus. Last month, as his old home crumbled beside him, he was hustled off to begin a new life in Dabney gardens.

A seven-and-a-half-foot copy of the Apollo Belvedere in the Vatican Museum in Rome, the statue was commissioned by Louis Bradbury, a prominent Los Angeles resident, and secured for the new Throop College by architect Elmer Grey in 1911. Several generations of undergraduates can testify that, for a statue, Apollo is in practically perfect condition.

