

Raised Arches, or, You *Can* Go Home Again

IN JANUARY 1973 *E&S* chronicled the dismantling of the Calder arches prior to the destruction of Throop Hall. Now, after languishing neglected for the intervening years in the limbo of a city storage yard, they're back home — adorning the connecting bridge between the east and west wings of the new Arnold and Mabel Beckman Laboratory of Chemical Synthesis. This sequel is a happy conclusion to what once promised to be a story with an inglorious end.

The arches were created in 1910 by Alexander Stirling Calder, a well-known sculptor and Pasadena resident (though only for four years; he left town when the project was finished). Calder also sculpted the pedestal of the Washington Arch in New York City. His father was a sculptor and so was his son — also named Alexander — who originated the mobile. Myron Hunt and Elmer Grey, architects of Throop Polytechnic Institute's first building, thought it should have an imposing entrance, symbolic of the glorious future of the new school, and invited Calder's suggestions. Although most of the board of trustees thought Calder's plan for sculpted arches a bit too grandiose, Norman Bridge, board president, took the side of art and architecture and prevailed on the board to change its mind. (Bridge also paid Calder's commission, which may have helped.)

When the arches were unveiled on February 5, 1910, admirers reportedly came from all over southern California to witness the great cultural event. David Starr Jordan,

president of Stanford, remarked in his dedication address 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."

Calder provided his own description of his grand allegory, which was read at the dedication by Institute President James A. B. Scherer: "The design for the sculptural enrichment of the archways of the Throop Polytechnic Institute is an attempt to give plastic utterance to the aims and scope of the school. The motive for this expression, conceived in a free treatment of Spanish Renaissance, has been evolved after a perusal of the President's inaugural address, and broadly covers the whole field of human effort and intelligence under the heads: 'Nature,' 'Art,' 'Energy,' 'Science,' 'Imagination,' and 'Law.'

"Beginning with the spandrel on the left is Nature, in the guise of Pan piping his gentle joy of life. Flanking this is Art, the Poet inscribing his solution of the riddle of life. The left spandrel of the central group represents pure Energy exerting his strength, he knows not why. Then Science, gazing, and lighting his torch at the sun, which forms the central cartouche over the archway. The spandrels over the right archway are: (on the left), winged Imagination, exulting in yet unexplored possibilities, and Law, with watchful preparedness guarding the ancient tablets of the law.

"The pilaster decorations between the arches have as motives the sunflower (relating



Right: Robert A. Millikan stands in front of Throop Hall.

Below: Dismantling the Calder arches from earthquake-damaged Throop proved to be surprisingly easy.





1972 — Coming Down

Law is lifted carefully down from his 62-year-old perch on Throop (above), while below a forklift prepares to haul Art (presented by a poet) away to 13 years of ignominy in a city storage yard.



to nature); a terminal bust of Minerva, protectress of the Arts; a terminal bust of Mercury presiding over Science; and on the right the emblem of the Law. Below the pilasters — a composition representing Life, Death, Eternity, under the sunflower pilaster; Hammer and Anvil below the Science pilaster; a mask below that of Art; while below the Law pilaster is an open book grasped in a hand. The cartouche on the left has been made in the form of a lyre; that in the center, of the life-giving sun, with a border of the signs of the zodiac; and on the right, a great diamond in a setting of lilies and pearls (the rare and precious things of life).”

Scherer continued in a vein no less grandiloquent than Calder’s own: “This sculpture is one of the ‘rare and precious things of life’ because it speaks forever of the spirit to a world that is weary with care. The tired eyes of age will look to it and renew their youth; youth will see it and take hope; manhood and womanhood will pause beside it for refreshment. We give it to the fresh sunshine; to the matchless blue of our skies; to the smiling rains that fill our fields with plenty; to the live oaks; to our young men and maidens; to Pasadena; to California; to the world. It is yours.”

Although this oratory might seem somewhat overwrought to 1980s sensibilities, the Calder arches were at the time “the most important sculptural project created in Los Angeles” (except for Felix Peano’s work in Venice), according to Nancy Dustin Wall Moure in *Painting and Sculpture in Los Angeles, 1900-1945*, published by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. They had “the distinction of being the first ‘monolithic’ sculptures cast in concrete,” having first been modeled in clay. They were not, however, Spanish Renaissance, but the contemporary Beaux Arts style, Moure adds. Calder’s particular variation “was to simplify the forms, making them less effete, more attuned to the vitality of the West.”

As Throop Polytechnic Institute became the California Institute of Technology, and Pasadena Hall became Throop Hall, the building with its imposing entrance stood as the center and symbol of the campus that grew up around it. Although architect Hunt had declared that it was “built for the centuries to come . . . it is fireproof and it is earthquake proof,” unfortunately he was wrong. The San Fernando earthquake of February 9, 1971 left cracks and crumbling plaster, which

revealed that, even if the arches were not effete, the building was. Throop Hall was declared unsafe and marked for demolition, the arches along with it, since it was presumed impossible to remove them.

But then a last-ditch effort was made to try to save them after all, and it turned out to be remarkably easy. When workmen delicately attempted to remove the big ball representing the sun, it just rolled right out. The rest — in 46 pieces — followed, completed in less than a day.

The City of Pasadena agreed to preserve the arches, with the original intent of putting them somewhere in, on, or around City Hall. When that plan came to naught, someone thought of incorporating them into the design of what was to become the Plaza Pasadena shopping mall. But the mall's modern architects had little taste for the 60-year-old relics. Except for an occasional blast from Pasadena Heritage ("The saga of the Calder arches is a remarkable example of neglect, oversight and disregard for the great art of Pasadena's past"), the sculptures lay pretty much forgotten.

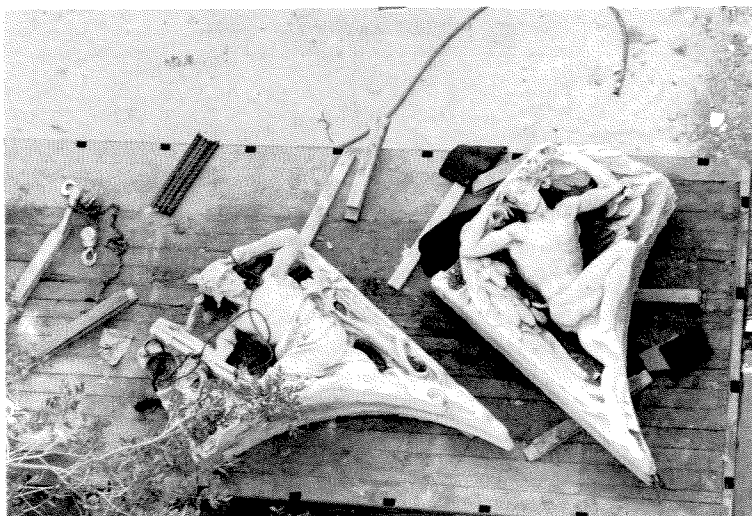
A couple of years ago Bob Fort, director of Physical Plant, started wondering about the possibility of bringing them back to campus. He and Mike McCallan, manager of engineering and estimating, stopped by the city storage yard where the big concrete pieces lay just to have a look at them — to see if they were in good enough condition to even *think* about it. Caked with dirt and with grass sprouting from them, the pieces still looked imposing. And salvageable. All they would need was a place to put them.

The opportunity wasn't too far off. When the new Beckman Laboratory was on the drawing boards, Fort looked at the bridge between Crellin and Church and thought that the arches just *might* fit. But Fort had arrived at Caltech just as Throop was being demolished, so he didn't have an everyday familiarity with their exact size. Subsequent study of the Throop architectural drawings and actual measurement of the pieces proved him essentially correct. Dave Morrisroe, vice president for business and finance, liked the idea, and so did Arnold Beckman. Architect Art Soderblom of Physical Plant came up with a design that was just one foot short of fitting in the entire assembly across the span. Although the two flanking pilasters had to be sacrificed to shoehorn the arches in, Soderblom is looking for another place for the



1986 — Going Up

The figure of Art is swung into its new place on the Arnold and Mabel Beckman Laboratory of Chemical Synthesis (above), while Law and Imagination (below) watch and await their turns.



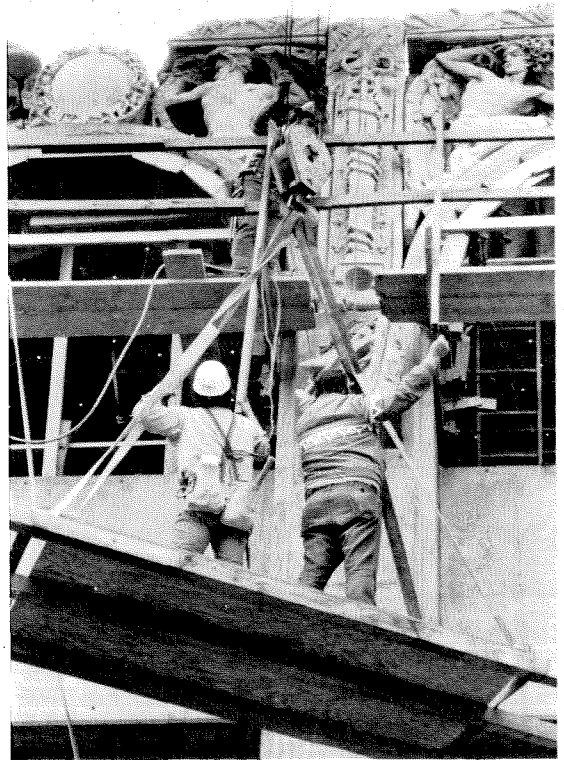


Over the course of a couple of months the Calder arches began to look quite at home.

pilasters on campus — perhaps nearby in the eventually landscaped courtyard enclosed by the new Beckman Laboratory, Alles, and Kerckhoff.

So the arches returned, the blocks wrapped in old carpeting and suspended from cable slings. They were settled into place over four days, looking quite as if they belonged there. Any damage they may have suffered in the 13 years on the ground is hardly visible at their new height.

And there is at least one improvement. In the renewed interest in the arches' history, a couple of people noticed a discrepancy between Calder's description and what was actually there. Jackie Bonner, former editor of *E&S* and now senior editor in Publications, noticed it, and so did Ernie Hugg, who worked at Physical Plant from 1943 until his retirement in 1975 and still comes back part time as a consultant. Calder describes terminal busts of Minerva, protectress of the arts,



and Mercury, presiding over science, at the tops of the two central pilasters. Under them are a hammer and anvil below the science pilaster and a mask below that of drama. For more than 60 years, however, the hammer and anvil have stood under Minerva, while Mercury presided over the mask. Had no one ever noticed? Not even Calder? Since Hugg was involved with replacement of the arches, the discovery provoked a controversy in Physical Plant over what to do now — some thought it ought to go back up the way it always was. But Hugg thought, "if the artist had something in mind, we ought to put it up that way if we have a chance." So the mistake has been corrected, and the arts and the sciences are presumably back where they belong.

Times have changed since 1910. For one thing, the sculptures will be given to skies of a somewhat less matchless blue than in Scherer's time. And contemporary observers are more likely to agree with the original trustees that the arches are a bit grandiose and might question whether the monumental figures very aptly "give plastic utterance to the aims and scope of the school." But their value as tradition can hardly be denied, and the Caltech community is happy to have the Calder arches back. It's nice that they fit so well on the Beckman Laboratory. □