



A Change for Gates

When the 1971 San Fernando earthquake exposed the structural weakness of Gates Laboratory, all the occupants and activities of the second oldest building on campus had to be relocated, and the beautiful old structure has stood empty and idle ever since. In fact, just to retain the shell required gutting the interior and reinforcing the walls with structural steel and gunite. But someday, it was decided, Gates would be renovated and used for the administrative offices displaced from Throop Hall, which was so badly damaged in the same earthquake that it had to be destroyed.

Now "someday" seems about to begin. The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation of Los Angeles has made a grant of \$1,000,000 to convert the second floor of Gates — which will be renamed the Parsons Building — into offices for the president, provost, and vice presidents of Caltech, and

to install the necessary mechanical and electrical systems, plumbing, furnishings, and an elevator. An additional \$1,500,000 is needed to complete the renovation of the building's first, third, and basement floors. Achieving that will make it possible for most of the Institute's administrative staff to be housed in one building again — thus relieving the space crunch in the academic buildings into which these officers have been shoehorned since 1972.

The difference between \$2,500,000 to convert a standing building into a usable structure and the \$70,000 Gates originally cost is an impressive testimony to the changes in the economy since 1917 (when Gates was completed) and 1981 (when its rebuilding will begin). Going from serving chemistry to serving administration is no small change either — and it gives us an excuse for a nostalgic look at some photographs from the olden-days.

The pictures in the lefthand column on the opposite page are, first, Gates as it looked in 1916. It was a shell then too, with the interior fittings still to be installed. Next is a 1921 photograph of the freshman chemistry laboratory on the first floor. Interestingly, the students all seem to be wearing identical shirts. At the bottom, a solemn moment in the 1925 commencement, one of many graduation ceremonies conducted from the porch on the east side of Gates.

The picture at the top right was taken in the 1930s and shows the ornate facade of Gates in detail. At the bottom is a closeup of the main door with the "Keep Out" sign that was hung there after the building was evacuated in 1972. One of these days, it's nice to know, a welcome mat will be laid down, and a gracious, elegant old building — shown above as it looks today — will be back in business. □

