



The distinguished astronomer George Ellery Hale?

# A Capital Idea

On a campus as small as Caltech's, you'd think every aspect of every building would be familiar to everyone. But it doesn't seem to work out that way. A quick (and statistically insignificant) poll of some long-time members of the Institute community a while back produced only one gleam of recognition as to the whereabouts of the models for the photographs on these pages; yet you can see them from one of the main campus thoroughfares. Anyone who is interested should stroll down the Olive Walk and take a look at the capitals on the colonnade between Ricketts and Fleming houses.

"Where?" is not the only possible question about them. Some of them look enough like well-known figures of the 1920's for us to wonder "Who?" and also "What can we find out about them?"

The answer to the last question — after extended, though intermittent, investigation — turns out to be "Not much." Not much, at least, in the way of solid identification, but the search yielded a few factual sidelights (for which, read on) and the opportunity to speculate (a game anyone can play).

Our first step was to examine the records in the Institute archives about the building and dedication of the student houses. We looked at several scrapbooks full of newspaper clippings and at the minutes of the meetings of Caltech's Board of Trustees. As far as we can tell

from those, back in 1931 when the first four undergraduate student houses were built, both the reporters and the recorders on the scene were either blind to or blasé about the decorative details of the buildings and arcades.

One solid lead was to Robert Lehman (BS '31). Bob was a member of a nine-student committee appointed in November 1930 to make recommendations to the Board of Trustees about the organization

of life in the new houses, which were to be ready for occupancy in September 1931. To fulfill this assignment, three of the committee, including Bob, spent three months traveling about the United States and Europe studying various types of student housing. Their report — issued in March 1931 as a *Bulletin of the California Institute of Technology* (Volume XL, No. 131) — was a strong voice in the way the houses were organized, but Bob doesn't



A Nobel Prize-winning physicist, Robert Andrews Millikan?

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remember that anyone paid any attention to the statuary that ornaments many of the house courtyards and arcades.

It's heartening to note that someone did notice them at the time, however. Small photographs of the figures were reproduced on the pages separating the various sections of the 1932 *Big T*, which was edited by Albert Atwood (BS '32, MS '33), now of Los Angeles.

The designer of the first four undergraduate houses was the distinguished southern California architect Gordon Kaufmann. Among other structures to his credit are the Los Angeles Times Building, All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, the Athenaeum at Caltech, and Santa Anita Race Track. Unfortunately for our project, Mr. Kaufmann died in 1949.

It was Arthur Klein, professor of aeronautics emeritus and Caltech alumnus of the class of 1921, who told us that his classmate John H. "Hi" Hood probably executed the figures. Our letter to Hood, who is retired from the cast stone business and living in Hawaii, produced the following reply: "Gordon Kaufmann, architect,

was the designer of the ornamental column and pilaster caps. Mr. Kaufmann had the models made of clay in Los Angeles. I took these models and made glue molds, in which I cast the pieces using a concrete consisting of crushed dolomite and a blending of cements.

"After casting, my men cut the surfaces with air tools to simulate natural stone. To

the best of my knowledge Mr. Kaufmann did not try to caricature anyone in particular. If they resemble someone, it is purely coincidental as my men did not have a picture to help them in their finishing."

Pictures they may not have had, but we still wonder what — or whom — Mr. Kaufmann had in mind when he made those clay models. □



The pilot of the "Spirit of St. Louis," Charles Lingbergh?

Violinist — and physicist — Albert Einstein?



This one is readers' choice.