



Special Collections Western Washington University Libraries

A Brief History of the 1924 General Plan

On April 19, 1924, President Charles H. Fisher reported to the Board of Trustees of the Washington State Normal School at Bellingham that he had interviewed Mr. Carl Gould of the firm Bebb & Gould, regarding a comprehensive plan for the institution. Board members Walter B. Whitcomb, Dr. W. K. Kirkpatrick, and Noah Shakespeare, along with President Fisher, met with Gould at the firm's offices in Seattle on June 6, 1924, to further discuss the project.

After careful consideration, it was agreed that Bebb and Gould should be employed, at a cost not to exceed \$2,000, to prepare a comprehensive plan of campus development that would accommodate the anticipated increase in enrollment to 2,000 to 2,500 students. At its regular meeting on July 29, 1924, President Fisher informed the faculty that architects were working on plans for "what the Normal School plant should be twenty-five or thirty years hence."

Gould's work received preliminary approval by the Board on September 30, 1924, and the faculty reviewed its progress at its meeting on October 7. The faculty approved the proposed building program on November 12, 1924.

At its meeting on December 1, 1924, the Board unanimously agreed to the final adoption of the plan, depicted in the drawing by Bebb and Gould's draftsman John Paul Jones titled *General Plan Showing Present Conditions and Future Extensions, Washington State Normal School, Bellingham, Washington*.

"Quarter Century's Building Plans Are Complete"—*Weekly Messenger*, Dec. 12, 1924

At the time of the plan's approval, "the Normal School plant" consisted of just four structures: the original main building housing both offices, the library, assembly halls, and classrooms; Eden's Hall; the Power Plant; and the Infirmary building. The new General Plan called for a separate library, as well as buildings for science, the training school, and industrial arts, an auditorium, a gymnasium, a social hall, and new men's and women's dormitories. In addition, an open-air theater was proposed for Sehome Hill.

Enrollment at the school, Dr. Fisher told the *Weekly Messenger*, would probably reach 2,000 students in ten years. "If the school grows in this way," he continued, "the plan is not extravagant; on the contrary it is very conservative. The adoption of this program of development is probably the most significant step in the history of the school since its origin in 1899."

The new library was the first result of the new plan. Designed by Bebb and Gould, with the active participation of President Fisher and librarian Mabel Zoe Wilson, it was completed in 1927.

(Please turn over for the story of the Plan's discovery and restoration)

The Plan Comes to Special Collections

In 2000, University Archives & Records Center Manager Gail Kleer welcomed a visitor who arrived carrying a large rolled drawing that she had found while going through her father-in-law's possession following his death. He had been a professor at Western, she said, and she felt that the drawing should be returned to the University.

The visitor was Nora Karason, and her father-in-law was Dr. Halldor Karason, a native of Blaine who earned both a bachelor's and master's degree at Western. After completing his Ph.D. at the University of Washington, Dr. Karason joined Western's faculty in 1949 and subsequently served as director of the humanities program and as director of general studies. He retired in 1979 as Professor Emeritus and passed away in 1998 at the age of 84.

It is not known how or when Dr. Karason came to be in possession of the 1924 General Plan nor what its state of preservation was when he acquired it. By 2000, however, the drawing had been stored rolled for so long that it would not lie flat. At some point in its past use, it had been mounted onto a stiffer surface that was later removed, leaving behind large pieces of backing paper and adhesive residue.

The surface of the drawing was heavily soiled and abraded as well as badly stained from both moisture and acid migration. There were also numerous deeply discolored creases and many tears, both large and small. Two large, by now ragged holes had been punched along the top edge, presumably to allow the drawing to be hung. The drawing's condition was, to say the least, desperate.

The restoration of the Plan was undertaken by local paper conservator Kitty Friesen, whose expert, painstaking attention to detail slowly brought the drawing back to a strong semblance of its original vividness. Tom Calenberg of Fairhaven Frames selected and made the superb new frame and provided archival mounting of the drawing.

The Western Libraries funded restoration and framing of the 1924 General Plan. Special Collections is now uniquely privileged to make this priceless artifact of the University's history available for all to see.

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