



The Bassetti Addition *Mabel Zoe Wilson Library* Western Washington University 1970-1972

On February 9, 1967, the Western Washington State College Board of Trustees selected Fred Bassetti & Company of Seattle to design the second major expansion of the Mabel Zoe Wilson Library. Although the original 1928 building, by Charles Bebb and Carl Gould, had been enlarged only five years previously by noted Northwest architect Paul Thiry, it had proved inadequate for the library's rapidly growing collections, services, and number of users. In addition, the modernistic Thiry additions, so at odds with the character of the Bebb & Gould design, were widely criticized. By July 1967, architect Fred Bassetti stated that his design aims for the new project were *"to provide for more students and faculty, to correct present deficiencies and to create a character which encourages student involvement, a building that is more than a study hall or a repository of books, a building that lives."*

By late 1968, Bassetti had developed the concept of completely surrounding the Thiry additions in order to unify the architectural styles. Originally, the new addition was to be limited to 75,000 square feet, but a phased approach was soon developed to ultimately provide a total of 142,000 square feet keyed to student enrollments ranging from 8,000 to 15,000. In early 1969, the first two phases were combined into one, with the aim of achieving an immediate increase of 90,000 square feet of space. On June 25, 1970, on the recommendation of Fred Bassetti, the Board accepted the bid of Cawdry and Vemo Construction of Seattle.

As construction began that summer, planning also commenced for the next phase to add another 64,000 square feet of space. To accomplish this, Bassetti proposed two wings on the opposite (north) side of Wilson, one reaching out parallel to the bookstore across High Street and the other extending parallel to the south end of Old Main. The result envisioned was *"an esthetically attractive, functional, centrally located library capable of serving 15,000 students."* In the end, the state legislature did not approve full funding for the final phase. Among other needed improvements, completion across Wilson of the highest (now sixth) floor was a significant casualty of this development.

The principal Bassetti addition was substantially completed in the spring of 1972. Dedication ceremonies took place on November 4 of that year, with the State's senior Senator, Warren G. Magnuson, providing the dedication address.

Overall, the Bassetti addition increased the area of the library by over 90,000 square feet. The dramatic new exterior featured the same type of brick façade and clay tile roof that characterized Bebb & Gould's original building. Ground floor arcades and sculptural window hoods and bays complemented the design features of nearby buildings constructed around Red Square, Western's central academic plaza. The library building had indeed been restored as *"the focal point of academic and architectural aspects of the college."*