

# The Mabel Zoe Wilson Library

## Rotunda

The stained glass window Mabel Zoe Wilson hailed as “*one of the most beautiful windows in the whole Northwest*,” still looks down on the area of the 1928 library known as “The Rotunda.” This space, also called the “main delivery hall,” was intended in its impressive dimensions to provide a suitable transition to the richly decorated, light-filled Reading Room with its high ceiling and elegant oak furnishings.

As well, many of the library’s core services were originally located here. The main circulation (or “charging”) desk was found to the visitor’s right at the top of the stairs. Opposite stood the card catalog, positioned in front of an office suite with two entry doors, leading to the head librarian’s office and library workrooms. Between the catalog and the circulation desk, the visitor crossed the terrazzo-patterned marble floor to reach the bronze-studded doors opening into the Reading Room itself. An elaborate chandelier, suspended from the Rotunda’s dome and styled after the art nouveau overhead lamps adorning the Reading Room, provided faceted light by which to marvel at the area’s lofty spaces and stained glass panels.

Of the Rotunda’s original features, only the office suite and the Reading Room doors remain. Until the early 1970s, a solid wall with a single door could be seen in the niche originally fronted by the circulation desk. The door provided entry to the “glass stacks.” These stacks, which occupied the area now filled with reading tables, held the collections not shelved in the Reading Room. They consisted of opaque glass walkways, not unlike catwalks, accessing book stacks mounted on dark green steel uprights.

In the glass stacks, it was possible at the edges of the walkways to see all the way down to the first level, or up to ceiling level. The glass stacks were demolished, along with the wall separating them from Rotunda, during the second major renovation of the library in 1970-72.

The short stairway adjacent to the main staircase leads up to one of the levels added to the library during this same renovation. Architect Fred Bassetti wrapped an entirely new building around the south facade of the original library, extending it toward Haggard Hall and creating four floors (five on the west end) of badly needed space to complement the original building’s two main floors. He retained the fine stained glass window so admired by Miss Wilson, artfully making it a design element in the hallway that links the east and west ends of one of the new levels. You can admire the top half of the window from its original exterior aspect by turning right at the top of the short stairway and entering the hallway.

The suite containing Mabel Zoe Wilson’s office and library workrooms retains its original dark-stained wood paneling and built-in book shelves. The library’s administrative operations vacated this space after the first major renovation of the building in 1961-62. A variety of library and University services have been housed here since that time. It is the library’s hope to one day refurbish these historic rooms.

The Rotunda was painted in the 1990s. The original chandelier disappeared many years ago. The present fixture was installed in 1995.