

The Building Boom of the 1920s

By Amy Lucadamo, College Archivist



John Lortz

In the 1920s, Wilson College experienced a transformation beginning with the construction of Lortz Hall and ending at the close of the decade with the opening of Recitation or Warfield Hall. The face of the campus morphed from Victorian gables and wrapping porches to gray, Gothic stone buildings with an unmistakable “college” look. While the Trustees and President Reaser, President McKeag and President Warfield planned and maneuvered for the construction of a recitation hall since the early 1900s, donors often had other ideas for their namesake buildings.

The beginning of Wilson’s building boom, which was the laying of the cornerstone of Lortz Hall on October 9, 1922, inspired Elizabeth Shaw Groves ’25 to meditate in the *Phaethra*:

How strange these silent thoughts, my lonely dreams! –
Like drifting smoke against an evening sky,
They steal upon my vision and it seems
Veiled in their maze I see tomorrow lie.
Tomorrow – aye a world of fantasy!
But time moves on, and soon what is today,
Will be no more, but only memory,
The phantom voice that calls from far away.

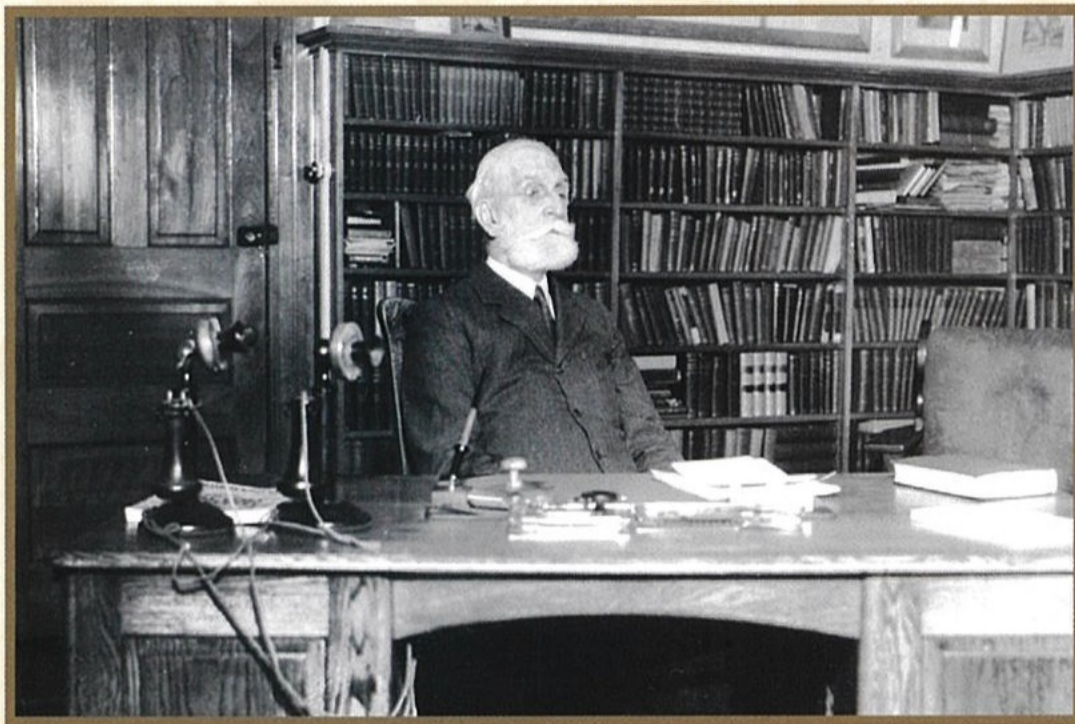
Her prediction is salient today as the limestone, Collegiate Gothic building that originally housed chemistry and physics is minuscule compared to the LEED-certified Brooks Science Complex and its long list of assets. Likewise, knowledge of the man, John Lortz, who died more than 100 years ago, has faded from Wilson’s memory. Lortz left \$30,000 to Wilson College for the construction of a science building upon his death in 1903, and the

bequest was fulfilled upon the death of his wife in 1919. Lortz was a Chambersburg landlord and grocer according to 1880 and 1900 census information. College records do not indicate that he had a relationship with Wilson before providing for a building in his will.

Just a month after the dedication of the John Lortz Science Hall, the cornerstone was laid for the John Stewart Memorial Library. The funds for the construction of the library were donated by the Honorable George H. Stewart as a memorial to his younger brother, the Honorable John Stewart, Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Chambersburg resident and long-time member of Wilson’s Board of Trustees. In an article written at the time of the library’s dedication in 1925, John Stewart was described as being “one of the best informed men in the state on all subjects” and a lover of literature, but he also had a long history of service to the state and nation. [Editor’s note: Please see the feature article *The John Stewart Memorial Library: Yesterday and Today* to read more on the history of Justice John Stewart.]

In contrast to the lump sum donated by George H. Stewart for the library, Riddle Memorial Hall, was funded largely by donations made by alumnae in honor of a man many considered a personal friend. In the May 1926 *Alumnae Quarterly* the Riddle Memorial Fund Committee made an appeal for donations:

FOR YOUR OWN SAKE
FOR THE SAKE OF OUR FRIEND, MR. RIDDLE,
FOR THE SAKE OF YOUR WILSON CHUM,
FOR THE SAKE OF THE WILSON GIRL OF TOMORROW –
get an envelope and stamp, search your pocket book for one dollar bill, send it *now*...



President Ethelbert D. Warfield

Fundraising for Riddle Memorial Hall lasted for two years before construction started in July 1927.

In her speech at the dedication of the building on June 9, 1928, former president of Wilson College Dr. Anna J. McKeag noted that in his capacity as general passenger agent of the Cumberland Valley Railroad, Mr. Riddle “made himself personally responsible to a degree probably never surpassed by any officer of any railroad” for “the safe and comfortable transportation of our Wilson College students.” Riddle also used his Cumberland Valley Railroad connections to organize excursions for faculty and students to Mont Alto and Caledonia.

He was beloved by the campus community not only for his service to the College on the Board of Trustees and dedication to the students, but for his warm, welcoming personality and renditions of the songs “Lucky Jim” and “The Man with the Cork Leg.” He enjoyed college activities and even spent the afternoon on the day that he died watching field hockey practice. According to the January 1925 *Alumnae Quarterly*, he offered to join one of the teams “in his usual jovial manner.”

Between 1922 and 1928 Wilson had added three major new buildings to its campus, but the recitation hall that President Reaser identified as a need as early as 1903 had not yet been built. Feeling the need for classroom space pressing, President Ethelbert D. Warfield began the appeal for donations for another new building in earnest in the mid-1920s. In a pamphlet entitled “Wilson College: Proposed Recitation Hall,” Warfield laid out the case for yet another new building noting that current arrangements for classroom space in Main, Alumnae and Lortz Halls “are no longer adequate to the requirements of a college of the standard of Wilson.” Warfield anticipated that the new building would cost \$150,000 and wrote that being “beautifully located on the grounds of a progressive college for women . . . will give dignity and permanence” to the building.

Construction of Recitation Hall was completed by the start of

the fall semester in 1930 and when President Warfield resigned in June 1935, Wilson’s board was presented with a petition from the student body asking that the name of the building be changed to Warfield Hall. The Board of Trustees approved the name change at their February 1936 meeting just four months before the death of President Warfield following a short illness. From 1915 to 1935, Warfield’s presidency was marked by growth in the student body, faculty and endowment, and campus improvements.

Warfield was born in Lexington, Ky., in 1861 and attended the University of Kentucky and Princeton before being one of the first American students to study at Oxford University in England. He then studied law at Columbia University and was back in Lexington practicing law at the age of 27 when, in 1881, he was offered the presidency of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. In 1891, he became president of Lafayette College in Easton, Pa., where he served for 23 years. After retiring from Lafayette, Warfield moved to Pasadena, Calif., and briefly opened a law practice before being recruited for the presidency of Wilson.

Ordained as a Presbyterian minister in 1899, Warfield was known among Wilson students for his sermons at chapel services. He served on the Board of Directors of the Princeton Theological Seminary from 1894 to 1929 and was frequently nominated to represent the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. at the general council of worldwide Presbyterian churches. He was also interested in history and supported the American Historical Society and the Kittochtinny Historical Society in addition to writing two historical works.

Upon his retirement, articles in *The Billboard* and *Public Opinion* credited Warfield with elevating scholarship and the quality of education at Wilson in addition to the physical improvements that occurred on campus during his presidency. He must have been content with all he achieved at Wilson, because when asked by friends what his plans were after leaving Wilson, Warfield’s reply was “to go to Heaven.”



*The President, Trustees and Faculty
of
Wilson College
request the pleasure of your company
at the dedication of
The John Stewart Library
on Saturday, May ninth
nineteen hundred and twenty-five
at half past two o'clock.
An address will be made by
Hon. George Wharton Pepper, U.S.S.,
Senator from Pennsylvania*

*Please reply to
G. H. Bartle
Chairman of Committee
Chambersburg, Pa.*



Submit Your Wilson History

AMY ENSLEY, director of the Hankey Center, encourages alumnae of all ages to submit written accounts of their time at Wilson, memories of interesting careers choices, personal experiences as witnesses to “important moments” in history, etc. Ensley has been doing research on alumnae throughout the history of the College in preparation for a variety of presentations both on campus and off. She has found the first-hand accounts of alumnae particularly valuable and would like to expand the collection of alumnae memories so that future researchers will continue to have a strong record of the lives of the women who attended Wilson. While the Hankey Center and Boyd '33 Archives continue to gather oral histories, written accounts are extremely valuable as well. Please send submissions to amy.ensley@wilson.edu.

From the

Archives

Wilson is sponsoring its first Annual Essay Contest celebrating National Women’s History Month. The contest is open to students in grades 9-12. The winning essay will focus on a significant person, event or movement in women’s history and analyze the relevance or influence today. The winners will receive monetary prizes and will be recognized at an awards ceremony at Wilson College as part of the month-long celebration of National Women’s History Month.

Please check the College website and the Hankey Center website for updates.

Request for Display Case

The Heritage Committee of the Alumnae Association is interested in acquiring a display case to hold mementos from the McClure collection. The collection has been divided between a small glass-enclosed wall unit on the second floor of Norland and storage in the Boyd '33 Archives. We would like to place the collection in the Norland parlor to accommodate visitors interested in seeing the items. If anyone has a suitable display case, perhaps four to five ft. high and 2 1/2 ft. wide, that would blend with the furnishings of the parlor, please let Amy Ensley know by email at amy.ensley@wilson.edu.

Celebrate National Women's History Month

March is National Women’s History Month, and the theme this year is Women’s Education – Women’s Empowerment. Wilson will have presentations throughout the month to celebrate, including a lecture by Hankey Center Director Amy Ensley on the history of the education of women in the U.S. and where Wilson College fits in. Other programming includes research presentations by Wilson students from a variety of courses.

On Thursday, March 1, Amy E. Farrell, chair of the Women’s and Gender Studies Department at Dickinson College, will present her research that includes 20th century U.S. culture, U.S. women’s history, body politics and the history of fat stigma. She has published two books and appeared on “The Colbert Report.”

Orr Forum

Ethical Formation in a Post-Secular Age

April 16-17, 2012

Dr. Jennifer A. Herdt, Yale University

Three Sessions:

Autonomy After Virtue
Monday at 5 p.m.

Scripture (Secular and Sacred) in the Task of Ethical Formation
Tuesday at 10:30 a.m.

Forming a More Perfect Union: Democratic Virtues, Proximate Goods, and Christian Formation
Tuesday at 7 p.m.

All events are free and open to the public and will be held in the Harry R. Brooks Complex for Science, Mathematics and Technology. Reservations are requested. To RSVP or for more information, please visit www.wilson.edu/orrforum or contact Gretchen Babendreier at gretchen.babendreier@wilson.edu or 717-264-4141, ext. 3203.