



The Jacobson Doors

University guests who begin their campus tours at the OU Visitor Center in Jacobson Hall haven't far to go to find their first historic treasure. Just above their heads, on the second floor, are five massive oak doors inset with 30 intricately hand-carved panels, depicting the history of art and the life of man through the ages, from "The Cave Man" to "The Modern American Builder."

The panels date from the Depression era, when "starving artist" was more than a tag line. Oscar B. Jacobson, then director of the School of Art housed in the building that would later bear his name, funded the project through a federal Works Progress Administration program for four of his students—Derald T. Swineford, Margaret Giles, Anita Furray and Paul McBride. Starting in 1934, the four collaborated on 20 of the panels celebrating subjects of their own choosing—Oceanic and Arabian art, manuscript writers, Indian dancers and weavers, potters and sculptors, the bull fighter, the American migration, among others.

The last 10 panels, highlighting such topics as the Viking age, the Gothic period and the Italian Renaissance, are Swineford's alone, presented as his master's thesis, which he completed in 1945. The student artists also accentuated, sanded and finished 30 commercially carved linen-fold panels, which hung alternately with their originals, for 60 in all.

But their work, intended for posterity, amazingly disappeared sometime in the 1960s, possibly removed to preserve the panels during a renovation. With several subsequent changes in building use and the personnel who might have remembered, the panels were stored in the newer Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art and their origins forgotten for 30 years.

Jacobson Hall's most recent reincarnation came in 1997, a complete restoration to house the Visitor Center and other offices and meeting rooms. While admiring the refurbishing, FJMA's assistant director



Gail Anderson took one look at the doors to the upstairs lounge and felt that something was missing. She recalled the set of mysterious carved panels stored at the museum and made the connection.

In his thesis, Derald Swineford meticulously recounted the federally funded project and detailed the inspiration behind each of the carvings. Today that volume has been elaborately rebound and is on display at the Visitor Center beside the remounted panels that four gifted OU student artists labored more than a decade to create.—CJB



Artist Derald Swineford, at top, carves one of 30 Jacobson Hall door panels; another, "The Gothic Period," is detailed below left. Visitor Center Director Leslie Baumert, below right, stands beside one of the four restored carved oak doors.