



postscript. The Legacy of Burton Hall

If a predominant architectural tradition exists on OU's Norman campus, it has to be the "Cherokee Gothic" established by its early buildings, notably Evans Hall and the original Bizzell Memorial Library. Even much of the recent construction, while not replicating the style, evokes its spirit and adheres to the red-brick-and-white-limestone look. But there are significant exceptions—the concrete massiveness of the Physical Sciences Building, the south oval's brick boxes, the stark "1950s modern" Gould Hall. Then there is Burton Hall, unobtrusively tucked away on Elm Avenue between Goddard Health Center and the Elm Avenue Parking Facility.

A small, two-story building designed by faculty member William Stanley Burgett and first occupied by the School of Home Economics in 1952, Burton Hall clings jealously to its uniqueness. The best description *Sooner Magazine* could manage in 1954 was its having an "exterior of blue glass and pink brick." Professor emeritus Arn Henderson, the campus' resident architectural historian, dips considerably deeper, seeing in Burton Hall one of five campus buildings he considers exceptional works of architecture (the others being Evans, Bizzell, Catlett Music Center and the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum of Natural History).

Burton Hall reflects the organic architectural tradition of Frank Lloyd Wright and OU's own Bruce Goff, Henderson says. He cites the play of rhythms in its design, such as the columns canted out at the top, the pattern of the windows on the sides of the linear building, designed in a stepped configuration that magnifies a sense of expansiveness belying the actual size of the hall.

Its architect, Bill Burgett, recruited to the faculty by Goff in 1948 and remaining until his death in 1968, shared Goff's reverence for Wright's "organic" tradition, many expressions of which were built in Norman and throughout Oklahoma in the '50s and '60s. But Henderson describes Burton Hall as a "stand-alone building," its architecture not matched by any others in the community.



Built in 1952 for the now-departed OU School of Home Economics, Burton Hall is notable for its unique architecture in the Frank Lloyd Wright tradition.

But if Burton Hall's look is passé, its original purpose is even more so. Hundreds of Sooner alumni, most of them women, still mourn the passing of the discipline housed there from 1952 until its final dissolution in the late 1980s—the School of Home Economics, founded at OU in 1919.

Helen Brown Burton, the school's long-time director for whom the hall is named, turned earth at the 1951 groundbreaking. A few weeks later her portrait was presented to the school for placement in the new building, which was constructed by the Haskell Culwell Company at a cost of \$547,130. She retired in 1958, and in 1962, the OU Board of Regents approved the official naming of Burton Hall.

Burton came to the University in 1927. Her area of expertise was food and nutrition; that and her extensive travels made her a popular source of feature stories for local newspapers. She championed carp as a food fish, developed recipes for those with wheat or milk allergies, promoted as food additives the calcium in crushed eggshells and dry skim milk—and reported to Normanites from Europe on the astonishing practice of Danish women smoking cigars and the high amount of

carbohydrates in German cooking.

Helen Burton died in 1968 and left a portion of her estate to the School of Home Economics. For a number of years the bequest funded faculty research grants.

She was spared knowing that her beloved school, its name having been changed from home economics to human development in 1982, would be discontinued and her building turned to other uses. Interior design already had been moved to architecture in 1982; phasing out of the other programs began in 1984. Fashion design disappeared; other departments absorbed the elements of early childhood and life span development, while nutrition survived through a merger with clinical dietetics as nutritional sciences in the College of Allied Health.

In 1991 the Department of Communication and the Julian P. Kanter Political Commercial Archive became Burton Hall's new tenants. Although renovations have occurred over the years, the seldom-noticed building steadfastly has retained its retro look, waiting patiently for the fickle wheel of fashion to return to blue glass, pink brick and the liberating feel of the Bill Burgett's architectural rhythms.

—CJB