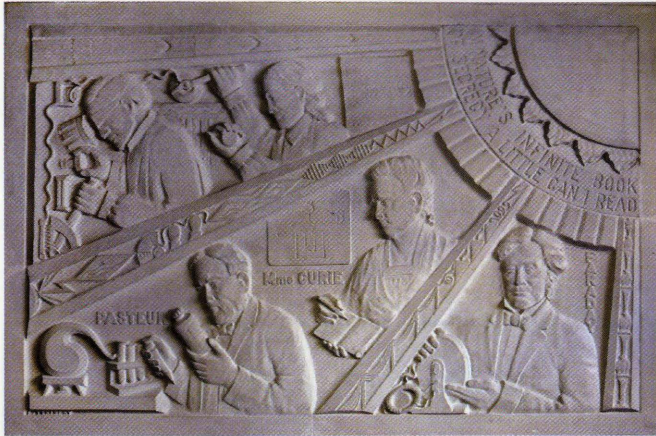




# Nielsen Hall Sculptures



ABOVE: Under a Shakespearian quote, Terebesy pays tribute to Pasteur, Mme Curie, Faraday and unnamed figures in the top panel thought to be Otto Hahn and Lise Meitner, co-discoverers of nuclear fission.

RIGHT: Another quote, author unknown, heads the bas relief honoring discoveries of the prehistoric man, Euclid, Archimedes, Newton and Galileo.

Imagine visitors in 1948 streaming into the brand new Research Institute building on Van Vliet Oval. As they entered, most would have paused to admire the matched set of bas relief sculptures inside the front door, the work of noted Hungarian-born stone sculptor, Louis Terebesy. But much has changed over time.

Since 1965, the building has been known as Nielsen Hall, after its most illustrious faculty member, Jens Rud Nielsen—or simply the physics and astronomy building. After renovations and expansion, there are several entrances dispersing the traffic away from the sculptures, their history reduced to a small, recently added placard.

The placard resulted from the curiosity of Associate Professor Stewart Ryan and his history of science colleague, Professor Peter Barker, who added Terebesy to their research interests. The artist's grandson in Tulsa, Lester Allen Terebesy, supplied clippings and personal memories; an Internet search yielded other details.

Terebesy was born in 1892 and, in his homeland, was an engineer and architect as well as sculptor and painter. In

World War I, he was a demolition expert on the “wrong side.” He came to the United States in 1921, eventually settling in Chicago, where he made his mark as a sculptor. His work graced buildings on the campuses of the University of Chicago, Northwestern, Purdue, Mundelein, and the Arkansas State Capitol. Most notably he did all the fine stone carvings on the beautiful WGN studio building, part of the Tribune Tower complex, becoming a friend of its owner, the publisher Colonel Robert McCormick.

His circle included architects Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright and physicists Edward Teller and Enrico Fermi, as well as other celebrities and movie stars. He created props for motion pictures. His fellow Hungarian, architect Joseph Koberling, lured him to Tulsa in 1944, where he lived until returning to the Chicago area in 1956. He died in 1959 at the age of 67.



Louis Terebesy, center, as a WPA artist during the Depression, is shown teaching youngsters at the Chicago School of Design.

The Nielsen Hall sculptures remain his contribution to the University of Oklahoma. Undoubtedly conceived in consultation with Nielsen and probably Teller and Fermi, the works are a tribute in bas relief to great scientific names—from prehistoric man, the discoverer of fire, through Euclid, Archimedes, Galileo, Newton, Faraday, Pasteur, Mme. Curie—and left two unnamed, perhaps to protest an injustice of the times. Peter Barker identifies the two as Otto Hahn and Lise Meitner, co-discoverers of nuclear fission, for which Hahn received the 1945 Nobel Prize in chemistry, not shared with Meitner, a woman and Jewish.

—CJB