



postscript. Recycling Hester Hall

Ninety years ago Hester Hall and its mirror image, Robertson Hall, conveniently located on the east side of Elm Street, were the answer to housing prayers for the University of Oklahoma. This fall Hester fulfilled another long-held desire when its doors reopened as the home of OU's College of International Studies.

From 1892 to 1925, the University had no dormitories. Sooner students largely lived in boarding houses or spare rooms in private homes. The 9th Oklahoma Legislature finally authorized (without any funding) the construction of two dormitories for women, to be financed by student fees, scheduled for opening for the 1926-27 school year. At the same time, the Student Union project was underway nearby with its various shops and services. The landlords of the thriving boarding houses and the town's merchants adamantly but unsuccessfully opposed both developments, which were situated just a 3-minute walk from classes and offering food service.

Hester Hall was named for Elizabeth Jane Hester, who had been a missionary to the Choctaw and Chickasha tribes and also ministered to wounded soldiers during the Civil War. She died in 1928. Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson, for whom Robertson Hall was named, was a teacher and linguist, who translated the New Testament and much of the Old Testament into the Creek language. The mother of Mary Alice Robertson, the first woman to be sent to the U.S. Congress from Oklahoma, Ann Robertson died in 1905.

Hester and Robertson Halls proudly boasted 122 rooms to accommodate 244 women residents. Each room measured 13½ by 12 feet. The two houses, each having its own resident hostess, were connected by a kitchen, dining room and lounge. In their last year as dormitories, 1972, some men students were housed there, and for years the dining room was a popular campus coffee break spot.

The halls served a number of functions in subsequent years, notably as the primary University Book Store before



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A three-story element has been added to the west façade of Hester Hall, providing a new main entrance to the College of International Studies and giving the former women's dormitory the Cherokee Gothic look that is identified with the Norman campus.



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Two of the 244 women students housed in Hester and Robertson Halls are shown in their room when OU's first dormitories were opened for occupancy in 1926-27.

its move to the stadium parking facility. Today Robertson houses the Graduate College and Graduate Student Life, and also retains its association with the role of women at OU as home to Women's and Gender Studies, as well as the Center for Social Justice, the Religious Studies Program and the English Assessment Program.

Hester Hall took a step up when several international student services located there, including Education Abroad and International Student Services, on the way to being consolidated as the fast-growing College of International Studies. To create a setting in keeping with its elevated status as

the University's front door for the growing international community, Hester was in dire need of not just a facelift but a complete gut and remodel, OU's director of Architectural and Engineering Services, Brian Holderread explains.

Addition of a three-story element on the west façade provides a new main entry and a quiet study area on the first floor, and, with remodeling of the breezeway connecting the two halls,

gives the building the familiar Cherokee Gothic look. The ground floor features classrooms and lecture halls, two lounges—one of them extending outside into a plaza area—and administrative and advising offices. Faculty offices and conference areas occupy the upper floors.

The year-long makeover now complete, Lady Hester, at 90, has assumed the latest in a long line of uses that its original designers never envisioned. Her better features have been preserved while her space has been completely reconfigured to serve the needs of today's Sooner students. Standing among a number of reclaimed historic campus structures, she fits right in. —CJB