

McWhinnie to Receive Medallion Service Award

Entering Ralph E. McWhinnie's office on the second floor of Knight Hall is like entering a time machine. The journey begins in 1916 when McWhinnie, a young man from Converse County, first came by rail to Laramie and the University of Wyoming.

"There were 292 students attending the University that year," he says. "In 1920," the year he graduated with honors, "35 bachelors degrees and 10 two-year diplomas were awarded and the school had grown to 375 students."

McWhinnie, often called "Mr. Mac," was recently chosen to receive the 1980 Medallion Service Award recognizing 64 years of devoted service and personal dedication to the university.

"I can remember when I stayed up all night with crews posting grades by hand," McWhinnie recalls. "Why, we even did transcripts by typewriter until 1938. Now, of course, it's all mechanized."

He began his career at UW helping out as a records clerk during the summer of 1918. Before he graduated, he was hired to take over as Registrar and Director of Admissions.

During his 43-year tenure at the post McWhinnie instituted the "Statistical Summary of the Division of Admissions, Registration and Records," an annual publication chronicling university records since its founding in 1887. What began as little more than a pamphlet is today an informative, 225-page volume.

He was also catalogue and bulletin editor from 1942 to 1963. At the request of President Aven Nelson, he started the first bookstore on campus in 1921 and managed it for seven years.

He has held a variety of additional assignments on campus including 37 years as official basketball scorer for the university and state tournaments, six years as secretary and two years as president of the Alumni Association.

What is so remarkable about McWhinnie, according to former UW students, is his brilliant memory. For years, he knew every person who came to the university.

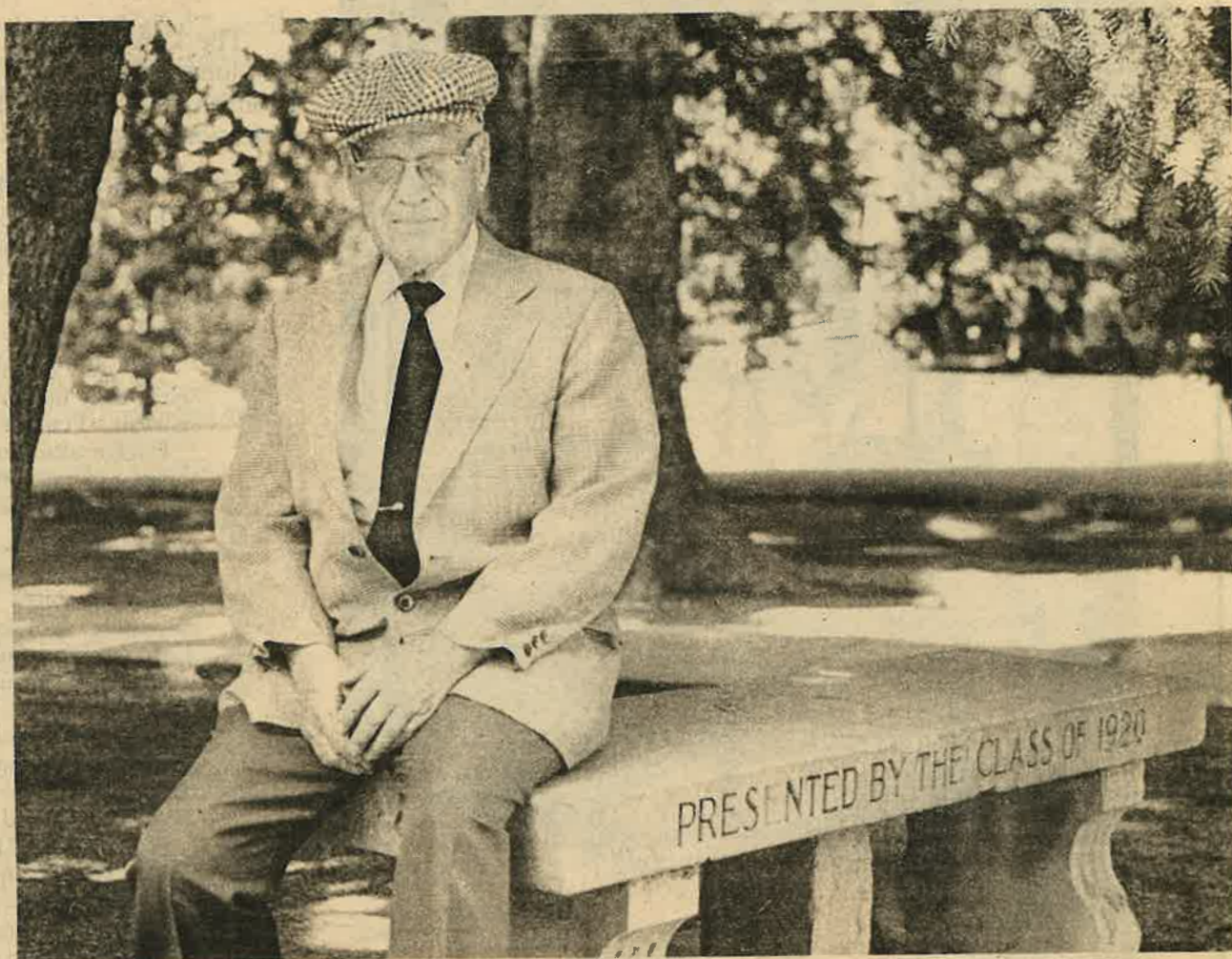
McWhinnie gathered all of the new freshmen every year in the balcony of the Half-Acre Gymnasium and lectured them on the meaning of a college education and the behavior that was expected of them, according to a former student.

His friends complain that it is impossible to get anything done on visits to other Wyoming towns with McWhinnie because he recognizes practically everyone they meet on the sidewalks.

"He represents the single most important tie to UW in the minds of people all over the country," an admirer said.

McWhinnie is still active in his work with Sigma Nu Social Fraternity, which he helped charter on the campus. For years the leading fraternity in academics, it marks its sixtieth anniversary this year. McWhinnie holds pin No. 2 out of 1350.

"I believe in the fraternity system," McWhinnie says. "And I'll help anyone from any fraternity that asks."



Medallion Service Award—Ralph McWhinnie

Woody Haines, a UW alumnus and a Sigma Nu, recalls that McWhinnie always had a stabilizing influence on the fraternity.

"He would never let us forget that the principle purpose of college was an education," he said. In 1972, the fraternity named McWhinnie to its national "Hall of Honor."

McWhinnie, who held the rank of professor, has seen marked changes in the university since 1920. But the greatest contrast can be seen, he says, in the leadership of the school.

"In the early years, the presidents were ministers and teaching scholars. The trend today leans heavily toward financial management skills and public relations with the legislature."

He thinks the faculty had more influence in shaping the university in the early years than they do now. He also believes that the faculty from that era would compare favorably with those present today. "Although they didn't get the nationwide exposure in their areas as they do now, and they didn't have as many opportunities for research," he says.

Students too, reflect the differences in society and in the university between 1920 and the present, he says.

"It's a more mobile, more sophisticated society. Transportation, for example, is completely different. Students came here by train in the early days, there weren't any highways."

He recalls when he was a student it took an entire day to travel overland from Laramie to Cheyenne and back by way of Tie Siding.

He describes UW now as "Truly a state university. It

has been very successful in reaching out and serving Wyoming.

He bristles at the suggestion that the "quality education" available at UW now is somehow a recent achievement.

"Within the means available, there has always been quality education here," he asserts.

"Over the years, there has been a transition from education for personal satisfaction to education for professional development," he says.

He cites the growth of professional law, nursing and pharmacy in the state as a result of the development of professional education in those areas at UW.

Since he retired in 1963, McWhinnie has edited a book, "Those Good Years at Wyoming U," a collection of historical vignettes written by UW alumni. He was an administrative consultant for two years and worked as a university archives consultant for three years.

He is the senior Past Master of the Laramie Masonic Lodge No. 3, and has an unbroken attendance record of 54 years with Rotary International. He was designated a UW Distinguished Alumnus in 1957, making him the only person to receive both the Medallion Service Award and the Distinguished Alumni Recognition.

To cite all of "Mr. Mac's" professional, honorary, civic and social offices, distinctions and honors would involve literally thousands of words. Suffice it to say, that his luminous career ranks with such other UW pioneers as Frank S. Burrage, Justus F. Soule, June E. Downey and John Corbett. Someday, no doubt, he will be memorialized too, on the campus where he has been a fixture for 64 years.