

THE CALTECH Y

75 Years of Involvement

by Theodore C. Combs



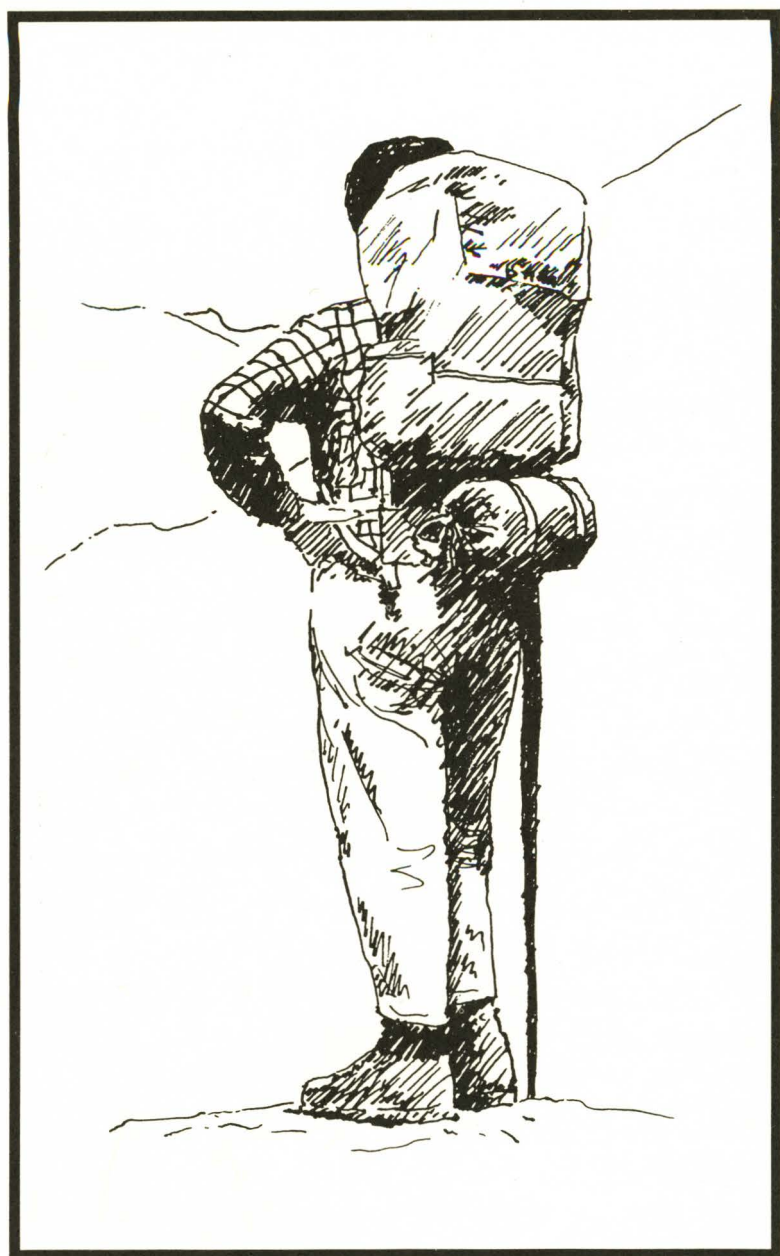
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Foreword

It is a happy coincidence that the 75th Anniversary of the Caltech Y coincides with Caltech's Centennial Celebration. A board committee has been charged with finding meaningful ways to celebrate our birthday. After dinner at the Y retreat last autumn Ted Combs recounted the founding of the Y in 1916 and this committee immediately convinced him to do some more research and write it up. This booklet is the result.

Ted Combs graduated from Caltech in 1927 with a major in Civil Engineering and went on to a career in that field, with six years spent in the Army Engineers during World War II. Throughout his life, his main avocation has been Caltech. This year he is a member of the prestigious Centennial Steering Committee. He has had many posts with the Alumni Association: president, chair of Seminar Day, leader of the alumni effort for the 75th Anniversary Capital Campaign which led to the acquisition of the Alumni House, the hiring of an alumni director, and the publication of *Caltech News* for alumni.

At Lee DuBridge's request, in 1968 Ted took on the joint job of secretary for the Caltech Board of Trustees, secretary of the Institute, and director of the Associates. He brought that latter group under the development

department—a move which strengthened the Associates and their support of Caltech.

Ted has had 65 years of service to the Caltech Y. As an undergraduate he served for two years as the vice president of the student cabinet of the then Caltech YMCA and has been on the board several times since graduation. He cochaired the Friends of the Y for a few years and currently is a board member along with his wife, Carmen.

At the retreat last October the board discussed its mission statement and as part of a revision of its by-laws has since adopted the following wording:

The purpose of the Caltech Y is to provide resources and opportunities to enrich student life; to enable students to learn about themselves and their place in the world community through increased social, ethical and cultural awareness; and to address unmet student needs.

As you read through the following history you will see that these ideals have always been the underlying mission of the Caltech Y.

Happy Birthday and long may the Y prosper!

*Marshall Cohen, Chair
75th Anniversary Committee*

*Cornelia Hopfield, Chair
Board of Directors*

THE CALTECH Y

75 Years of Involvement

On the evening of October 1, 1916, eleven students of the Throop College of Technology met to discuss the possibility of organizing a Young Men's Christian Association chapter on campus. They wanted to introduce a sense of higher ideals and greater cohesiveness to the student body of their college and felt that the YMCA might provide the best means for accomplishing this.

But to establish a Y on campus, they first had to overcome various obstacles—chief of which was a requirement by the national organization that the local executive officers be members of a Protestant church. The students resolved this issue by deciding to de-emphasize

religion and emphasize social service instead—which was acceptable to the National YMCA. Robert A. Millikan had already arrived on campus as part-time director of physical research and it is probable he influenced this decision.

Max Carson, a senior, was elected the Y's first president. He proceeded to outline the new organization's goals as he saw them: to create a student employment bureau and an organization to welcome new students on campus and to seek a means for bringing the desired higher ideals and a religious influence—even if low-key—into college life.

During the remainder of the academic year, the YMCA sponsored a regular weekly Bible class, made plans to welcome the next freshman class, started Max Carson's proposed student employment bureau and began publication of a monthly newsletter. The officers also convened an assembly of the entire student body during which they presented a short talk on the aims of the Y, listened to a mandolin solo, joined in a recitation not only of the Lord's Prayer, but also in several yells for the debate and baseball teams. Finally they heard a report from the state YMCA secretary on the social service programs the YMCA was conducting in European prison camps.

In December, when students cleared a huge T on the side of Mount Lowe—with the staking out being directed from the upper fire escape of Throop Hall by students

with surveying instruments—it was members of the Y who participated in celebrating this fête by toting cider and doughnuts out to the fatigued students.

Throughout the Y's first year, help came to them from the regional and national YMCA organizations and the state YMCA secretaries spent many hours on campus helping the Y develop its program and budget. The establishment of the employment bureau was particularly important. At that time, scholarships and student aid were virtually nonexistent and many students had to work long hours to meet expenses.

One renowned graduate from the class of 1918—Frank Capra who went on to become one of the world's greatest motion picture directors—was an extreme case. He not only worked to support himself through school, but his family as well. It is of note that while at Throop he didn't allow his killing schedule to detract from his involvement in campus activities and friendships—he was a member of both the Gnome Club and the Y and was editor of the *Tech*.

In later years Frank Capra made an important contribution to both Caltech and the Y: a part of his 1,100-acre Red Mountain Ranch in Fallbrook. The ranch house plus five adjoining acres was acquired by Caltech to be used as a retreat by many campus organizations, including the Y.

As the years progressed, the Y expanded its services. In 1917 with the United States involved in World War I,

a military training camp was established on campus and students were in uniform. To provide refreshments and other services, members of the Y pitched a tent in the training area and eventually expanded their ministrations to include the training camp at the Arcadia balloon field—now the site of the Santa Anita Race Track.

The following year the Y joined the bandwagon and raised the prodigious sum of \$1,725 for war bonds. During the war years, Y members even found the time to sponsor Pasadena's Boy Scout Troop Seven.

In 1919, J. Stanley Robson—on leave from Lucknow Christian College in India—was chosen to be secretary of the Y. The organization's activities had become so extensive that the Y's members felt the need for experienced leadership. Robson filled the bill. During his year in office, membership increased from 26 to 150, and the budget went from \$100 to \$2,000.

Throop College became the California Institute of Technology in 1920 and Robert Millikan resigned from the University of Chicago to become chairperson of the executive committee. The Institute hired Harold Z. Musselman as the Y secretary and he provided yeoman service until 1923.

During this same period dean of freshmen John R. Macarthur—a master pipe organist as well as an ordained minister who excelled in biblical history—took an interest in the Y. He established the discussion groups from which eventually emerged what is known today as New



Student Orientation.

Caltech during the early 20s comprised Throop Hall, Bridge Laboratory of Physics, Gates Laboratory of Chemistry, Culbertson Hall plus some buildings left over from the war effort. Most students lived off campus, many in fraternity houses.

Engineering was more prominent than science. Typical student attire included corduroy trousers and a corncob pipe—often clenched in the teeth but seldom smoked. Looking back from today's vantage point, Caltech students of the 1920s seem a bit sheltered and naive—cigarettes were mostly for daredevils, there was no booze and other drugs were decades in the future.

Occidental and Pomona Colleges provided dates for dances when students didn't have their own supply. At

the first frosh dance of 1923 the chaperons included a 22-year-old graduate student, Linus Pauling, and his vivacious wife.

After Musselman completed his term as secretary, the Y office operated strictly with student volunteers. During the academic year of 1924/25 the volunteers did remarkably well. Y activities included a frosh reception, a banquet to install officers for the year, a skating party in Alhambra, a clearing party for the T on Mount Lowe (with the usual cider and doughnuts), and the student employment bureau. This volunteer effort over time would evolve into the student executive committee, or Excomm, which has been so central to the Y's development as an effective campus organization.

In 1924 an advisory board—composed primarily of faculty, local clergy and Caltech alumni—was formed to help students finance the Y, advise on program matters and, inasmuch as no secretary had remained more than two years, provide some continuity. Shortly thereafter this group facilitated the recruitment of Charles Schwieso, Jr., as Y secretary.

Schwieso's impact was immediate, and he proved to be a key person throughout the coming decade. Not only did he initiate a room and board listing service, but he also personally inspected every unit before recommending it. Full of ideas, he provided speakers for assemblies, organized the Cosmopolitan Club to bring foreign and

American students closer together and arranged faculty/student mixers.

The freshman handbook, the *little t*, was begun during Schwieso's tenure, as was a student loan fund. Begun with \$1,500—provided by many donors—the fund was quickly put to full use. To this day, students may borrow up to \$50 for 30 days, interest free.

In addition to stimulating interest in Y activities, Schwieso also provided individual counseling—often a “Please Do Not Disturb” sign could be found on his office door during a consultation. Under his leadership Y membership nearly doubled. In 1927, the *Big T* noted that

the Y is one of the most important and helpful extra-scholastic organizations on campus. The tireless work of Chuck Schwieso has made this organization indispensable to student life. And, most important of all, if you are down and out and sick of it all, go talk to Chuck and you'll come away with a smile and new lease on life.

Nineteen thirty-one was a historic year for student life—the Institute completed construction of four undergraduate houses: Blacker, Dabney, Fleming and Ricketts. Each would be a separate unit with its own dining room and lounge—providing accommodations for about 75 students—and each would have its own officers and freedom to arrange social affairs and establish traditions with the

supervision of its own resident associate. All would be under the control of a master of student houses.

The transition to on-campus living involved phasing out the fraternity houses where at that time most undergraduate students lived. This was a traumatic idea for loyal members who feared that traditions developed over a span of several decades would go down the drain and that, if the fraternities continued as off-campus organizations, they would soon become "last-man's" clubs. With the help of the Y and of understanding faculty members like Dean Macarthur, however, the shift took place and was amazingly successful.

After a few years it became apparent that the student houses were not living up to creating the social interaction that had been anticipated. Low student participation in activities and at social functions finally resulted in the appointment of a "Committee on Campus Life and Interests" which concluded that "attributes which are not sufficiently developed among students at the Institute, but which ought to be encouraged," were self-confidence, social adaptability, the ability to express one's self, the capacity to live and work with others and an appreciation of the value of responsibility. According to the committee, it wasn't that the typical undergraduate was averse to those qualities, but simply lacked an adequate appreciation of them.

The committee decided the student houses were a primary contributor to the problem, coupled with the fact

that students living off campus missed out on what the houses did have to offer. In addition to these factors was the severity of the Institute's grading system—at times there seemed a greater emphasis on grades than on learning.

All of this presented a challenge to the Y as well as to the Institute's administration. Indeed, the struggle to keep the rigors of Caltech's academic life from driving students into apathy and withdrawal continues to this day.

Attempting to draw more students out of their scholastic shells, the Y increased the diversity and number of clubs, assembly programs and discussion groups—continuing the emphasis on the employment bureau as well. Despite the Great Depression, there was no lack of applicants for Caltech, yet many of these students urgently needed part-time work.

In 1934, after ten years of outstanding service, Charles Schwieso left the Y to pursue an advanced degree. A senior, Charles Thomas, was retained as part-time secretary. He had served on the board throughout his years of undergraduate study and was familiar with every Y activity.

Two years later, the Y continued to be without a professional secretary and its student volunteers were suffering from a work overload. The problem was partially solved when the student executive committee decided to expand itself to twenty members. The student body,

meanwhile, took over publication of the *little t*, relieving the Y of that task.

John Price, a Yale Divinity School student, became full-time secretary in 1937, remaining until 1941. A genuine leader, he wisely began his term by holding a three-day planning and reorganization conference, thus not only getting acquainted with the students but also listening to activity proposals as well.

Services such as the employment bureau, the library and the book exchange—at which students could, and still do, sell books and buy used texts at reasonable prices—became more efficient. Because of the war in Europe and the prospect of imminent United States involvement, students began taking an interest in various peace movements, as well as in government reform, labor issues and other moral and political questions. Speakers were scheduled accordingly. Christmas and Easter religious services were instituted as were a series of religious luncheons.

The war was a source of great anxiety. Although the United States had pledged to stay out of the fighting, a massive defense effort had been initiated and national guard units were on alert. To students, military service seemed a real possibility. Needed more than ever, the Y fully lived up to its motto, “Here to Serve.”

The year 1942 saw another change in leadership. Paul Ackerman became secretary of the Y and proved capable of facing the many challenges presented to

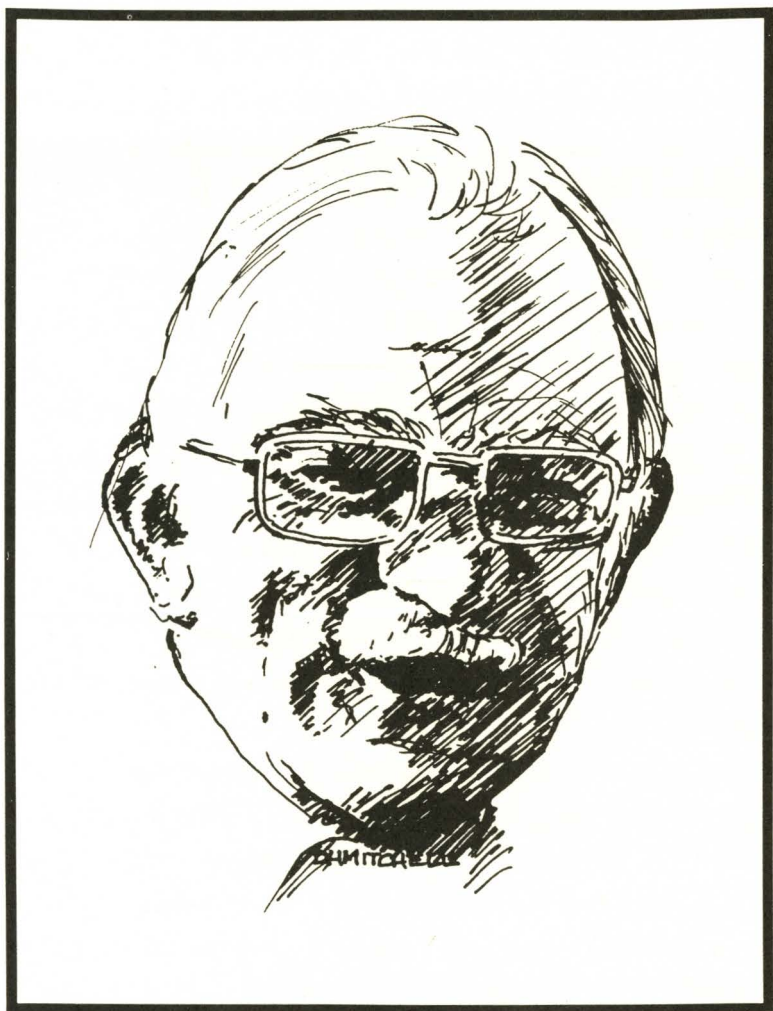
Caltech after Pearl Harbor. Chief of these was the V-12 program, instituted by Caltech and the U.S. Navy to train in haste officer candidates.

Each student house had its own naval company. Despite the added pressure on campus life, the program did have an interesting benefit—since students had been recruited from various colleges for the V-12 crash course, some of whom were outstanding athletes, Caltech ended up fielding a winning football team which defeated schools such as USC and UCLA who had long emphasized their sports programs.

The end of World War II also brought the retirement of Robert Millikan. The following year, 1946, Lee A. DuBridge assumed the presidency of Caltech and Wes Hershey became the executive secretary of the Y.

Hershey proclaimed a new motto, "If There Is a Need, We Fill It," and lost no time living up to it. The student body responded by subscribing the full quota of the finance drive.

Initially, the Hersheys lived near the campus in a rented house on Orangewood Street. When the Y's advisory board decided it was less costly to own than to rent, Margaret Fleming—the first female member of the advisory board—advanced the purchase price of the house as a loan. However, the Hersheys hosted so many student gatherings, which grew quickly in size, that soon more room was needed.

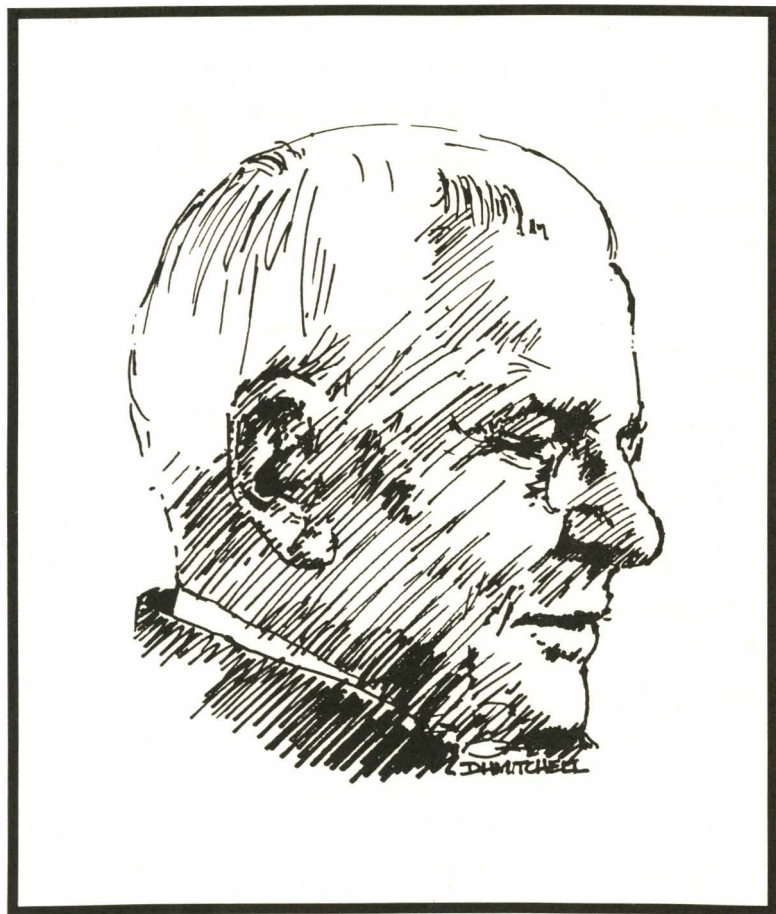


Wesley L. Hershey

Advisory board chairperson Stan Johnson conducted a series of meetings that resulted in the plan to build a new residence adjacent to the campus at 391 South Holliston Avenue. Johnson retained the architect who had designed his Laguna Beach home—the estimated cost for this venture was \$15,000—and Johnson offered to give this amount subject to the successful solicitation of an additional endowment of \$15,000 to pay for taxes and insurance.

The board members turned out to be successful fund-raisers for they had no difficulty meeting their goal. Robert Millikan contributed \$1,000 and Margaret Fleming established a separate endowment with the money repaid her for the loan to purchase the Orangewood Street house. Years later, when the Holliston residence was no longer essential to the Y and the Institute needed the property, it was sold to the Institute with the proceeds becoming the J. Stanley Johnson endowment fund for the Y.

Under Wes Hershey's direction the programs of the Y continued to grow and diversify—among the more popular were a luncheon club and weekly fireside chats with faculty. President Truman's decision to produce the H-bomb was a major discussion topic. Participation continued in the annual Asilomar Conference in Pacific Grove, California—a retreat that has proven a formative influence in the lives of many Y members since the 1920s.



Robert Andrews Millikan

Typically Caltech sent about 30 students to this week-long conference, held right after Christmas for over 400 participants representing YWCA's and YMCA's from some 20 colleges or universities in the Pacific Southwest Region.

Beginning in 1951, and for years thereafter, the Excomm held an off-campus conference at Stan Johnson's home in Laguna Beach. Johnson, who had been so generous and was so deeply involved in the Y work, was glad to share his "retreat." Perhaps the most important result of these annual conferences was the establishment of the Leaders of America program.

Stan Johnson felt that the Caltech students were a bit cloistered and thus could benefit from contact with outstanding people of broader experience. He gave \$4,000 as seed money for a program which over the years has attracted renowned speakers such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Walter Reuther and Justice William O. Douglas. These events gave students the privilege of not only hearing these leaders but also of associating with them.

Robert Millikan attended several of the lectures and came away deeply impressed; it was a major factor in his bequeathing \$100,000—the bulk of his estate—to the Y to further its programs. With little warning, in 1953, the Institute and the entire scientific community were saddened by the death of this great leader. He had been "Mr. Caltech" for many years and a vital supporter of the Y. His bequest became the Millikan endowment fund

which is managed by the Institute. Over the years others have added to the fund which now provides about 20 percent of the Y's annual budget.

In 1954 the Y moved to a new building, near the student houses—the larger quarters providing welcome space for a meeting room and lounge. Meanwhile a three-year grant by the Danforth Foundation helped to augment a strained budget. Beach Langston held the fort while Wes Hershey was absent for a short period. As the decade wore on, there was little need for expanded services; the existing ones continued to serve well.

With the 1960s came changes. Three more student houses—Lloyd, Page, and Ruddock—were added, permitting nearly all undergraduates to live on campus.

The Friends of the Y was founded in 1961. After a three-year renewal, the Danforth Foundation grant had been discontinued, presenting the Y with a financing problem. Ken Rhodes and Richard Hayden, chair of the Y's advisory board, knew that other organizations were forming "friends" units in order to raise needed funds and that this was a possibility for the Y.

Hayden who had just become a judge didn't feel that his personal involvement in fund-raising would be appropriate. He also felt he would not have the necessary time to serve as chairperson. So Rhodes recruited help and launched a campaign to start the Friends of the Y. He and Hayden agreed to be cochairs and the Friends have had cochairs ever since.

Members of the Friends annually enjoy luncheons and dinners with significant speakers as well as the opportunity to get acquainted with students. The group has grown in size and now provides about 15 percent of the Y's annual budgeted income.

In 1962 the Winnett Student Center was completed. It houses the bookstore, a student lounge and—most importantly—new quarters and conference rooms for the Y.

The tumultuous 60s found the nation divided by racial issues and by the war in Vietnam. Through it all, the Y would maintain its traditional goal of involving students with current issues. As the *Big T* observed, "The Y is one of the largest and by far the most active organizations on campus." The Y's China Institute in 1966, for instance, attracted an unusually large attendance. When



Paul Goodman, a guest of the Leaders of America program, spoke on student apathy, some students—who didn't consider themselves at all apathetic—staged a protest march.

In 1966 the Y celebrated its 50th anniversary with a dinner in the Athenaeum and a program in Beckman Auditorium which had been completed just two years before. The chief entertainment was a musical potpourri, written and produced by Professor J. Kent Clark for the occasion. Board Chair Ken Rhodes announced that the Friends membership had grown to 167. Also the board of directors—formerly the Y's advisory board—and the Excomm had each grown to 24 members.

The turmoil of the outside world continued to touch campus. In 1968 popular staff member Burt Housman announced his departure from the Y to start his own ghetto school. He had hosted a conference on "The Ghetto and the City," addressing civil rights and black issues. As part of the program black activists had lived on campus for a week and in turn Caltech students had spent weekends with black families in northwest Pasadena. The students ended up with mixed feelings, but they certainly had a better understanding of a very different way of life.

Lee DuBridge retired that same year from the presidency at Caltech to become science advisor to newly elected President Nixon. His successor, Harold Brown, assumed office in 1969. The most important development



at the turn of the decade, however, was the arrival of female undergraduates as members of the class of 1973.

They didn't create as much of a stir as some had anticipated, perhaps because they were so few or because female graduate students had been on campus since 1954. The Y, however, was alert to their presence and welcomed their involvement in campus affairs.

Provocative conferences and discussions became a hallmark of the early 1970s. Some 250 students enrolled for "A Journey Into Self—An Encounter With Others," which involved 16 sessions, each three hours long. Another series discussed "The Drug Scene."

During this period the Y's board of directors held deep deliberations over the question of separating the Caltech organization from the national YMCA—not all members

of the Caltech Y were young, or men, or Christian. The decision to separate was made without hostility. It seemed appropriate to continue with the long-established abbreviation, Y. (One wit suggested that if the national organization objected to use of the abbreviation, the Y might call itself “the ex-Y.”)

During the 1970s, the Y’s Decompression “celebrations” became a permanent, if periodic, feature of campus life—providing relief during stressful exam periods. In the summer of 1974, while driving across the United States, Caltech student Paul Studenski was killed in an automobile accident. In his memory, his parents established the Paul Studenski Memorial Award whose purpose is to give the recipient time to travel and to reflect on the future course of his or her life, just as their son had been setting out to do. The selection of the awardee is made annually by a committee of the board of directors.

After 30 years of inspired service—with his title now director rather than executive secretary—Wes Hershey retired in 1976 amid the plaudits of an appreciative Caltech community. Besides guiding the Y through three decades of growth and change, he had been national president of the Student YMCAs from 1956 to 1960. The Institute awarded him a certificate of appreciation, but perhaps the most important aspect of his retirement to Hershey was the opportunity to pursue a huge backlog of interests such as travel and photography.

The retirement dinner honoring Wes Hershey was attended by some 250 loyal friends. Lee DuBridge gave a glowing tribute. Stan Johnson, who had been closest to Hershey through the years, spoke and presented him with a medallion. Then Hershey himself spoke, and he recalled his daughter Margaret telling him, "Daddy, Dr. Millikan called and said he's going to give you \$100,000." Hershey insisted that this might not have happened save for the contagious contributions of Stan Johnson. He concluded, "We have been concerned with fundamental human values and have been able to be at the right place at the right time."

Transition marked the following year as well, when President Harold Brown was lured to Washington to become secretary of defense. His successor, Marvin Goldberger, was inaugurated in October 1978.

Walt Meader, who had ably assisted Hershey over the years and already knew the Y well, was appointed the new director and kept up the Y's heavy schedule of activities. During his tenure, skiing increased in popularity and career counseling began to be taken seriously. He left Caltech in 1982 to pursue an active role in the ministry.

Huston Horn, an Episcopal minister, became director in 1982 and promptly announced his vision of the Y: "The Y is primarily an educational institution centering on the student as a person." Among other talents, Horn had the ability to book outstanding speakers and pay for them,

helped by Caltech's having turned over its President's Distinguished Speakers Fund for administration by the Y. Just a few of the speakers during the 1983/84 program were Richard Turco discussing "The Nuclear Winter Phenomenon," columnist Jack Smith on "How to Make a Column—But Never Make a Mistake," and Stephen Jay Gould talking about "The Fact of Evolution and the Politics of Creation."

Horn also had the foresight to hire as his assistant Julie Bolster, who by the time she moved away in 1989 had risen to the position of associate director. Under her guidance, the Excomm put on such regular events as Friday noon concerts and the Noon Updates which featured faculty and other speakers talking about their work. Also sponsored regularly were weekend sailing and horseback-riding excursions as well as ballroom dancing lessons and a galaxy of other activities.

Throughout the 1980s the SURF (Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships) program attracted more and more students. This in turn challenged the Y to provide programming during the summer. Backpacking trips became increasingly popular, with the Y providing rental camping and hiking equipment on a year-round basis. The Y also steadily expanded its program of free or subsidized tickets to a host of cultural events.

Meanwhile, a tradition had developed on the Y board—the election of couples as directors. Today, husbands and wives continue to enjoy attending meetings

together. The 70-member board—composed of representatives from the Caltech community and all members of the student Excomm—meets monthly for business and dinner during the school year. The annual long-range planning retreat is usually held at the Capra Ranch.

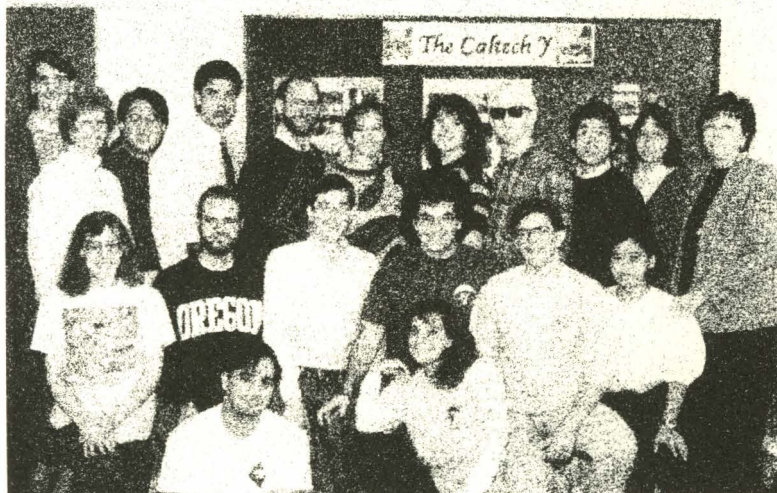
In 1987 Thomas E. Everhart succeeded President Goldberger. The next year saw the start of a series of unplanned personnel changes at the Y. Huston Horn returned to writing. His successor Ken McGuire was lured away by UCLA after serving only a year. Although the next director, Paul Gibson, stayed only a brief period,



he successfully started a program of student volunteer work in the Pasadena community.

During the summer of 1989 Lucy Guernsey was hired. She came from Fuller Theological Seminary where she had directed student services. Everyone has been impressed with her enthusiasm for her responsibilities, her fine rapport with students and board members and her ability to get students involved in community projects. Under her leadership, an increasing number of Caltech students are involved in Y activities and programs.

The year 1989 also witnessed the death of Wes Hershey. He had maintained contact with the Y throughout his retirement and had attended many of its functions. In his memory, the Y lounge has been named the Wes Hershey Lounge and contributions have been



provided for its refurbishing. Photographs of animals in the African game country, taken by Wes, hang on one wall. His memory will live on in this meeting room.

In outlining the history and activities of the Y, great credit must be given to the student Excomm, which plays so central a role in the organization's planning and operation. Now made up of 18 undergraduate and graduate students, they meet weekly for an hour. These students volunteer their time to conceive and produce programs that are not only stimulating and enlightening, but fun. They also serve as Y board members and work closely with the Y staff.

The Y currently receives support from a variety of corporations and foundations which accounts for one-third of the annual income. The United Way and Caltech itself are major contributors to a total budget of almost \$250,000. Many alumni have also given generously, none more so than Horace Baker or Robert L. Noland—who through his corporate affiliates, Ametek and Ketema, has funded an annual Leadership Institute and a series of Entrepreneurial Dinners to provide leadership training for Caltech students.

As Caltech celebrates its Centennial, the Y's Excomm, student volunteers, staff and board of directors look forward to serving the campus and the community. They will follow proudly in the tradition of those who have gone before, while leading a never-ending renewal of

student involvement with both the Institute and the world beyond.

Additional copies of this booklet are available from:

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