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Brooks Library

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What is in a Name? James Brooks Library

Perhaps no figure in CWU history is as beloved as longtime President James Brooks, who served as the school's top administrator from 1961 through 1978, then taught in the Department of Geography for another 13 years before finally retiring in 1993.

Brooks was a Wildcat nearly his entire adult life. He was born on October 10, 1925 in Chehalis, Washington. In 1943, he decided to miss his senior year at Mossyrock High School to join the US Navy. He later earned his high school diploma using military education credits.

In 1946, he enrolled at Central Washington College of Education (now CWU) on the GI Bill and persuaded Lillian Literal, who he was dating, to transfer to Central from Western Washington University. The two were married in 1947.

After completing his BA in education and social science in 1949, Brooks went on to earn a Masters and PhD in Geography from the University of Washington.

Following teachings stints at Eastern Washington University and Portland State University, Brooks was tapped to serve as Central 's President, while only 35 years old—becoming the only Central graduate to ever serve as the school's president.

During his tenure, Brooks guided Central during its transition from Central Washington State College to the present Central Washington University. He oversaw a massive expansion of the arts and sciences programs as enrollment increased from 2,300 to 7,500 when he stepped down.

Additionally, Brooks saw Central's physical size jump from about 113 acres to more than 300 acres and helped foster the removal of a railroad line that once intersected the campus (the former Milwaukee Road railroad), allowing it to become one consolidated entity.

Also during his tenure, Brooks deftly navigated the university through the tumultuous period of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when many college campuses experienced protests against the Vietnam War as well as racial and economic issues.

During his CWU career, Brooks was named Distinguished Alumni and Phi Delta Kappa CWU Educator of the Year in 1986, Distinguished University Professor for Public Service in 1990, CWU Alumni Lifetime Service Award winner in 2015, and was Commencement speaker in 1993.

Both Brooks and his wife were generous supporters of CWU's library and, in 1978, established the Friends of the Library Endowment and, in 1995, the Brooks-Shaw Endowment, which awards scholarships to students studying geography.

Between 1973 and 1976, Central constructed what was then known as the Library Complex, consisting of a four-story library building and a multi-story classroom building that later became known as Farrell Hall.

Both were built in the Late Modern architectural style with flush, brick facades, horizontal board-formed concrete belts and tinted windows. In 2003, the library was named in Brooks' honor.

In his retirement, Brooks continued to support CWU and the educational community, helping to reestablish the Friends of the Library group in 1995 and coordinating regular meetings of retired geographers in Ellensburg up to the end of his life. He passed away in Ellensburg on April 2, 2017, at the age of 91.