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Munson Hall

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What's in a Name? Munson Hall

In the early days of the Washington State Normal School (now known as Central Washington University), one of the school's stand-out faculty members was John P. Munson, who taught from 1899 to 1928.

Munson, called by CWU historian Samuel R. Mohler, "perhaps the most renowned scholar ever associated with the institution," served as a teacher and head of the Department of Biology during his time at the school.

Born in 1860 in Norway, Munson's family relocated to Shabbona, Illinois when he was four. He earned his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1897 and then taught German, educational pedagogy, and general sciences in a private academy in Sioux Falls, South Dakota in Wisconsin for four years.

According to Mohler, when Munson arrived at the normal school, he found an institution that was underfunded and under-equipped for teaching science, so he either personally purchased or improvised what he needed for his laboratory work. His workload was Herculean as he was called on to teach botany, zoology, anatomy, histology, cytology, embryology, ecology, taxonomy, neurology, animal psychology, bacteriology, hygiene and sanitation, and genetics.

Despite his heavy teaching load, over the years Munson managed to regularly produce research articles and published a book, *Education Through Nature*, in 1903. He was working on a manuscript on comparative cell studies at the time of his death in 1928 and it was never completed.

In 1897, while teaching in North Dakota, Munson met and married Sophie Josephine Mikkelsen, daughter of a fellow Norwegian immigrant and professor at the Lutheran Normal School. Following her death in 1944, the Munson estate donated nearly \$75,000 (more than \$1 million in today's dollars) to Central to establish a general scholarship fund that is still being awarded to deserving students.

Following Munson's death in 1928, several of Munson's students petitioned the university to name the men's dormitory building in his honor. Constructed two years earlier, the residence hall was simply called "The Men's Dormitory" until the name change.

Today, Munson Hall is one of the oldest buildings standing on campus. It, like Sue Lombard Hall, which was built at the same time, are examples of Spanish Colonial Revival architectural style that was considered fashionable at that time.

The brick structure was expanded in 1946-47 with east and south wings built onto the original building. The additions, also brick, were built in a Modern architectural style and lack the Spanish Revival touches of the original.