



# WERE YOU THERE?

## The Beginning

In 1908 UF's Department of Electrical Engineering was part of the Technological School, which offered courses in mechanical, civil engineering and mechanic arts. Electrical Engineering instruction was "planned so as to lay equal stress on classroom work, of the theoretical nature, and on laboratory work, of the practical nature." (UF Catalogue) To provide for work of the "practical nature," the University built a dynamo laboratory, a 35 by 18 foot, one-story wooden building specifically for electrical engineering—one of three new buildings that year.

The Electrical Engineering program had one professor, John Benton, who went on to become the first Dean of Engineering in 1910. The department offered senior courses in Dynamo-Electric Machinery, Alternating Currents,



*John Benton*

Electric Lighting and Transmission of Power, and Telegraph & Telephone Engineering. Under Benton's leadership, the engineering disciplines expanded into their own building, Engineering Hall, later renamed Benton Hall. It contained space for offices, classrooms, laboratories, and drafting rooms. The original Benton Hall was later demolished to make space for the construction of the graduate school's Grinter Hall.

The College's growth mimicked the development of Gainesville. A

contemporary described the city as "...well paved, [with] lighted and shaded streets; the water supply is exceptionally pure, and the sewage system is good...The moral atmosphere is wholesome, and for many years the sale of intoxicants has been prohibited by law." (1910)

Along with its prohibition of alcohol, Gainesville offered a quaint but strict academic community. Students lived in Buckman Hall Dormitory, which is still in use today. Since only men were admitted to the University, a single dormitory housed all of the students. Students at the university had to provide themselves with a "Charlottesville cadet gray" uniform which cost about \$15, "being much less expensive than citizen's clothing of like quality." Although UF administrators required students to wear these uniforms year-round, in the summer time they could wear a shirt, hat and a pair of white duck trousers.

Despite the dress code and living accommodations, which were regimented by contemporary standards, students were never wanting for outside social activities. For example, electrical and mechanical engineering students were able to join the Kelvin Engineering Club, which held meetings every two



1911—John Benton is pictured in the front row, third from left. To his left is Albert A. Murphree, UF's second president.



# A Trip through Time

by Angela Ventura Medyk  
& Susan McBow

weeks. This club merged with Civil Engineering's Transit Club in 1914 to form the Benton Engineering Society, which is still an active society.

## World War I

While student run engineering societies flourished, the university's administration turned its focus away from student life and toward society's involvement in the 'Great War'—World War I. Consequently, many functions of the University took second place to the war effort. An arrangement between the Committee on Education, the War Department, and the University

ensures school for radio operators. Dean Benton served as the Educational Supervisor for the school, which was disbanded at the end of the war in 1918.

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*Dean Joseph Weil, who encouraged the construction of the Engineering and Industries building to alleviate crowded classrooms and offices. It was completed in the early 1950s and later renamed Weil Hall.*

1928, the College established a graduate program for Masters degrees in Chemical, Civil, Electrical and Mechanical Engineering. Total enrollment rose to 290 with one-third being electrical engineering majors.

One EE graduate of this period, John V. Atanasoff, a 1925 alumnus, built the first electronic digital computer in 1937. Atanasoff's achievement along with other scientists later contributed to the allied victory.

## World War II

UF's enrollment plummeted at the start of WWII. In a June 1940 report, University President John J. Tigert commented:

Recent years have been so filled with change and adjustment which has accrued from local, national, and world conditions that the demands made upon a service agency like the University have been almost unprecedented. Just now, every activity at the University is being affected by the demand for such as will promote the national defense, and beyond this,



*The original Benton Hall, constructed by the end of 1911 and later torn down to make room for the graduate school's Grinter Hall.*

established the Army Training School. The school was designed to give vocational instruction to enlisted men, such as through the war mea-

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