Shields Library is named in honor of Peter J. Shields, who helped establish the campus. The library began in 1940 with the completion of what we today call the "north wing." Designed by architect William C. Hays (who also designed Hart and Walker Halls), the new structure housed both the library and campus administration, each served by one of the entrances on the north facade (Figure 1). Originally, the 2nd Floor accommodated both the Dean’s Office and the Main Reading Room—still in use today. On the 1st Floor, an entire room was devoted to books on herding!

Before the construction of a dedicated building, the library function was accommodated in the creamery building of 1908. The new Library and Administration Building, sited on the south edge of the Quad, replaced an old classroom building erected in 1915.

Due to successive expansions, Shields is now a four-story courtyard building designed in three distinct architectural styles. The original wing shows Hays’ experimentation with Art Deco, then in vogue. During the 1960s, the east and south wings were added, and the main entrance was moved to the east side, closest to Olson Hall. These are both modern institutional designs. Today we enter through the west-facing wing—in the postmodern style—designed by Simon Martin-Vegue Winkelstein Moris and opened in 1990. True to postmodern principles, this wing incorporates Art Deco elements inspired by the original building—like the bowed glass block form cantilevered over the entrance. This wing earned several architectural awards.

From 1943 to 1944, when academic instruction was interrupted due to World War II, the U.S. Army Signal Corps used the library building and officially converted the Main Reading Room to a training facility (Figure 2).

The centerpiece of the lobby is a monumental stair—Y-shaped in elevation—that aligns with the building entrance. However, this stair only serves levels 1–3. In order to access the fourth floor, one takes the elevator or secondary staircases. In addition, direct access to the stair is blocked in the entry vestibule by the curvilinear display case that bridges between the gates for entry and exit.

Aesthetically, the library’s centerpiece is the interior courtyard, which was formerly known as the “Sunken Garden” (Figure 4). Gracious trees—an Aristocratic Pear and Turkey Oak—provide shade and beauty, and contribute to making the courtyard a perfect place for studying, sitting, enjoying lunch and hosting library events. In fact, in 1948, the Sunken Garden hosted the first commencement ceremony for four-year students receiving their degrees from the College of Agriculture (Figure 5). We highly recommend that you take a moment to relax in the library’s courtyard.

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Assignment 1: Poster About UC Buildings

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