

# Mechanics' Institute Marks Its 100th Year

The centennial anniversary of the founding of the Mechanics' Institute will be celebrated this month.

It marks a milestone in California history, for the institute was the birthplace of technical education here.

It stood alone in the field for a third of a century and served as a major influence in the industrial development of the State for more than forty years.

Mechanics' Institute is best known today for its library, housed in its nine story building at 57 Post Street.

The collection numbers 155,000 books, uncounted thousands of monographs and pamphlets and is a partial depository for United States Government documents.

But the sedate appearance of the institution today belies a lusty history.

Incorporated on April 24, 1855, the institute first set up shop in a \$25 a month rented room at the northeast corner of Montgomery and California Streets.

## DEPTH OF DEPRESSION.

The founding came at the depth of a depression when the Sierra placers had begun to run out. Men of vision looked to agriculture and manufacturing to revive and sustain the young State's economy.

The aim of the institute was to provide mechanics with a technical education and other advantages. The first steps were establishment of a library and the beginning of classes and lectures.

In 1857, with \$300 in the till, the institute set out to further promote industry with a series of fairs. James Lick donated the use of a block of land.

By 1866 the institute was prosperous enough to purchase its present Post Street site and erect upon it a three story building at a cost of \$79,750.

The University of California was chartered the following year. The State Legislature recognized the pioneer work of Mechanics' Institute and included its president as an ex-officio member of the university's board of regents, a position held today by William G. Merchant, Mechanics' Institute president.

For a time, university lectures were conducted at the institute. A drawing school was added to its activities in 1871.

The Mechanics' fair of 1873 was staged in a \$107,000 pavilion on the east side of Eighth Street between Market and Mission Streets. The forty-one day event attracted 600,000 people. Successful fairs thereafter were held in the pavilion down to 1881.

In that year the institute purchased the land where Civic Auditorium now stands. Some fifteen fairs were held on the site until 1899, when the fairs were discontinued. The property later was acquired by the city.

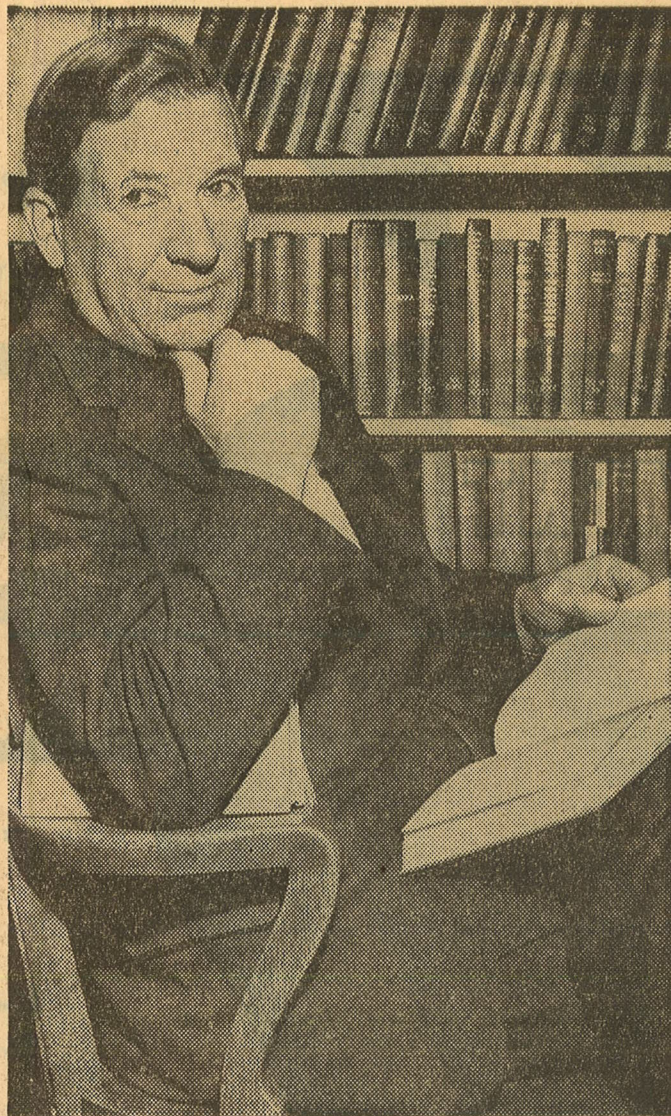
## DESTROYED BY FIRE.

By 1906 the institute had 4,150 members and a library collection of 135,000 books. It absorbed the Mercantile Library in January, 1906, and on the eve of the earthquake had a book collection of 200,000, all of which were destroyed in the ensuing fire.

Lost also were priceless files of California newspapers, a complete set of British patent reports dating back to James I and countless literary treasures. Gone also were the Post Street building and the Mechanics' pavilion, the largest building of its kind in the country at that time.

The present structure was erected in 1910 with money from the sale of the Civic Center site.

Under Head Librarian John Stump, the institute's collection now represents the diversified



**HEAD**—William G. Merchant, president of the Mechanics Institute, is shown in the well stocked library of the institution, which is celebrating its centennial anniversary this month.

interests of its approximately 5,000 members. At the same time, the library's technical and scientific materials have continued to expand with the professional needs of the atomic age.

Down through the years, the Mechanics' Institute Chess Club has continued to flourish, entertaining master chess players from throughout the world. Among the notable institute

players is A. J. Fink, who won the State championship five times.

Through membership dues and profits from the industrial fairs, the institute has managed to be virtually self sustaining over the years. Its greatest financial benefactor was James Lick, who contributed \$10,000 in 1883 for the purchase of books.

A bronze plaque of remembrance for Lick was installed in the former institute building.