Building names spark memories of past chancellors, benefactors

By Chris Doherty

After having had ample opportunity to examine the painted cinder blocks and tattered furniture of their dorm rooms for several weeks, Syracuse University freshmen may wonder whose names now grace their living quarters. Fear not, oh freshmen students, you're not alone. Many Syracuse University students harbored the same curiosities for generations. And now the long sought after answers to your questions have arrived.

SU students did not about the traditional "rah-rah-sis-boom-bah" when James Rocce Day was inducted as chancellor in 1893. They welcomed him with a warm, truly creative rhyme: "Day! Day! Chancellor Day! We've got him here and he's got to stay." Day Hall residents can really stand proud from the memory of an apparently loved and treasured chancellor.

When roaming in Haven Hall, students might (or might not) be interested in knowing that Erastus O. Haven was a man of many talents. During his time as chancellor he not only served on the Board of Trustees and taught English, but published many articles, translations and essays.

Robert Shaw began his career in the bakery business and worked to establish the Union Carbide and Carbon Co. Shaw Hall was built at the request of his widow who, upon her own death in 1944, left almost $1 million worth of Union Carbide shares to SU. Another outstanding financier and Board of Trustees member was Willis H. Booth, to whom Booth Hall was dedicated in 1963. Thomas J. Watson, president of IBM from 1914 to 1949, left his legacy in the form of Watson Hall.

For all men, women and poltergeists residing on the former site of St. Mary's Cemetery (Brewster/Boland complex), their benefactors were highly respected in the SU community.

John C. Boland, an affluent attorney and member of the class of 1899, left his name to the women's wing. Belle Louise Brewster was an SU faculty member from 1906 to 1933. She taught music and voice and was an accomplished performer herself. Also influential in the arts was Frank J. Marion, class of 1890, who founded the first movie company in Hollywood.

Flint Hall sits high atop Mount Olympus. Dr. Charles Flint was SU's fifth chancellor, serving from 1922 to 1936. Smokers and engaged students living in Flint might find it interesting that the chancellor forbade smoking and married students.

Flint also supported prohibition, football and student self-government. He raved against pacifists and had marathon autograph sessions where he personally signed over 800 diplomas.

Steele Hall was named after Esther Baker Steele, wife of the first real administrator of SU, Rev. Daniel Steele. Rev. Steele was vice president of SU in 1871, a year before Dr. Alexander Winchell was chosen the first chancellor.

When Steele was in charge, 41 students had a choice of two majors and five colleges — registration lines were shorter then.

Holden Observatory was named for the grandson of the first vice president of the SU Board of trustees — a man with an unknown name that will live in SU history. Until the Observatory was dedicated in 1887, the Hall of Languages stood in the middle of cornfields.

So when you are writing to family and friends and boring acquaintances, tell them something interesting. You don't have to look any further than your own campus.