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When they ran out of dead white men to name buildings after, they began naming new ones for guys who were still alive. Is a single UI building named for a woman? Sooner or later one will be, because every president — no matter how good, bad or mediocre — eventually is so honored.

But none has been yet. At least one building housing new computer-center laboratories is a caricature of a male chauvinist pig, who left behind a trail of misogynist writings.

Seashore, a psychology professor, was no closet woman-despiser. He promoted his views unabashedly in official university materials, academic journals and advice offered over decades from his dean's seat.

The university's Operations Manual lays down the law on "The Naming of Buildings" right next to the vital provisions, "Vending Machines." Section 60.100 ordains: "Because of the relative permanence of decisions to name buildings... it is prudent to allow reasonable time for consideration at each stage of the process."

How prudent was the UI when it bestowed the name Seashore on a building in 1931? No, this building is not a reminder of an earlier geologic period in Iowa, but a throwback to an earlier ideological era in the history of gender relations. Carl Seashore, for years the influential dean of the UI Graduate College, died in 1949. During the ensuing three decades, how prudently did the UI consider his denigrating attitudes and policies toward female students and professors before deciding to saddle us with the relatively permanent name Seashore, for years the influential psychology professor, was no closet woman-despiser. He declared vigorously that she was not going to be married. I then asked, "Do you really want to be an old maid?" That question stirred up the problem again, then being her depended convictions and urges and set up an artificial goal."

Seashore trumpeted his philosophy nationally through the Journal of Higher Education, proclaiming: "The real and wise intention of the most normal women undertaking graduate work is to prepare for being happily married to a scholar and cultured man."

What conclusions can we draw from this Neanderthal claptrap? Perhaps not every president or other high-ranking university official is automatically worthy of joining the edifice-immortals. President Virgil Hancher, for example, by moving toward rejecting federal funds, was responsible for the fact that the UI had fewer resources than kindred institutions in the early post-World War II era — being the only major university without a library building until the early 1950s.

The point of this critique is not to plead for an extension to prominent women in the perpetuating system of devaluing and dignifying on building plaques. Indeed, if 50 years after the death of a dead body, one can identify a one-time campus titan like Seashore, such obscurity suggests we might name buildings for meritorious non-luminaries such as librarians, secretaries and janitors.

But why name buildings for anyone? An obvious reason is to avoid the prosaic use of numbers or boring functional labels. However, if our goals are variety and a local touch, we could adopt aesthetically pleasing fantasy names or those of regional flora and fauna. Alternatively, we could draw on collectively held values — say, "Justice and Equality" for the College of Law, or "Truth and Accuracy" for the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Ultimately, the UI's drive to sell itself to the highest bidder may spare us these hard but fun decisions altogether.

With buildings increasingly self-named by capitalists deigning to return some of their wealth to the commons, the rest of us will have to draw on collectively held values.

Marc Under Marc Linder is a professor in the UI College of Law, and a local proponent of journalism Judy Polumbaum contributed the phrase "Neanderthal claptrap."